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Maud K. Cook

STRUAN

STRUAN

A NOVEL BY

Julia Magruder

AUTHOR OF *The Princess Sonia, A Beautiful Alien, ETC.*

*"When half-gods go,
The gods arrive."*—EMERSON.



BOSTON

Richard G. Badger

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STRUAN



I.

AT the age of nineteen, Jenny Lacy felt herself a woman, and a self-made one. Looking backward on her birthday morning, she was conscious of a sense of satisfaction. It was incomplete, however; for she was yet far from her goal, which was to become a popular singer of light opera. On the other hand, she was quite as far from the starting-point,—a distinct and never-to-be forgotten day, five years ago, when this daring ambition had entered her mind and anchored itself in her soul.

Since that day she had worked toward her purpose with the concentration of a passion, and now, at nineteen, she saw success in sight.

She had reached this point in her career by her own unaided efforts,—a fact pleasant to think upon, now that the goal, though distant, was

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visible; but she freely acknowledged that, along the weary way which she had come, she would by no means have scorned help, had she, at any time, seen her way to getting it.

Jenny had been ambitious from her childhood, though it had been long before she got a sufficient insight into life to understand that her restlessness, her excitability, her resentment of the actual about her, was in reality ambition; and it had been some time, even after getting that knowledge, before she had seen her way to any outlet for these inward strivings.

It had come, at last, with the knowledge that she had a voice,—not merely such a voice as could make pleasant music in Sunday-school and at “Commencement,” but such a voice as the big outside world might one day be willing to listen to. And that was the world of Jenny’s dream.

This dream of hers—which had lasted, without a break, from her fourteenth to her nineteenth year—had both a locality and a hero. The former was the city of New York: the latter was Lucien Struan, the distinguished musician, conductor, and composer.

Jenny’s first knowledge of Struan had come from hearing some one read aloud a newspaper article about him—one of the fulsome, melodra-

matic things which do yet, at times, become electrified by their subject, and informed with a certain dynamic element which even clap-trap writing and a vulgar point of view cannot disguise.

Undoubtedly, Struan was such a subject. There was magnetism in the man. All who came near him felt it, and it seemed even to extend to what was said and written about him. Many who skipped other personal paragraphs read those that related to Struan. And, when his name was mentioned, people generally stopped to hear what was said.

The article which had so influenced Jenny had many of the faults of its kind. It was sensational and overstrained and effusive; but, in spite of all this, it had, somehow, got into it some of the quality of the man. And Jenny, who had never felt the touch of such an influence before, vibrated to it through all her childish being. The article had a picture of its subject printed with it, a common wood-cut, which, however, like the writing, had a certain character in it, and which possessed the soul of Jenny, and played upon its sensitiveness more than any perfect beauty that she had ever seen.

Quite unknown to any,—for she was reserved in her nature, and had never had a confidant,—

the ardent little girl took all her money and bought the most beautiful blank book that she could find in the town, and pasted this picture on its first page, followed by the sketch of Struan.

This sketch described him leading his orchestra, and did not deal with the personalities of his life outside his musical career. So it introduced Jenny to him as a great musician and a powerfully attractive man, but told her nothing more.

After that, it became a habit with her to scan every newspaper that fell in her way, in search of the potent name; and, as time went on, her pretty scrap-book got richer and richer with the accounts of her hero's triumphant progress in his chosen field of labor and self-expression.

Even Jenny could form some conception of what such triumphs must be, for she had her own uncomprehended little thrills and stirrings when her voice would rise high above the rest in the Sunday-school singing, and people would turn and look, or when, at school commencements, she sang, as she knew, far better than any one else.

There was no friend, however, to praise Jenny when she did well or to stimulate her to do better. Her parents were dead, and she lived with a phlegmatic and hard-working sister-in-law, who saw nothing in music, at best, and looked upon

Jenny's pretty carolling as rather a nuisance than otherwise. Jenny's brother sent her to school, and gave her such advantages as the little Western village had to offer, and she was kindly treated, on the whole. But no one ever had even a glimmer of such thoughts about her as those which she indulged in for herself.

And, always, the centre of her system was Lucien Struan. Somehow or other, she must find the way of going to New York, and taking singing-lessons from Struan. Afterward — as far as she ever paused now, to look beyond that goal of glory — she meant to go on the stage.

With this idea firmly planted in her mind, it was amazing to see how silently and steadily, as the passing years changed her from a child to a rapidly maturing girl, Jenny managed to work toward her end. She studied well at school, and practised her music with an ardor and industry which amazed her teachers. She got from them the best attention and instruction that they were capable of giving; and when she went quite beyond them, as she soon did, she contrived to go for lessons, once a week, to a larger place about ten miles away. At the same time she was cultivating, more through her own intuition than from any other source, a talent which she had for reci-

tation. By the time that she was seventeen she was being paid for her services in singing and reciting at concerts and such entertainments.

As she was incontestably pretty and had a talent for picturesque dressing, she soon became a favorite, and might have gone on to a much greater success in this limited field.

But a limited field was not to Jenny's taste. She never swerved from her original purpose, and for two years she went about, filling engagements to sing and recite, working hard all the time at her music; and now, by dint of good management and strict economy, she had saved enough for her cherished purpose,—the removal to New York and the lessons from Struan.

Meantime she had followed him from afar through every step of his public career, and her scrap-book was full and overflowing. The original picture had been added to by many others, some ideally handsome and straight-featured, some repellently rough and rugged, according to the art or the caprice of wood-cutter or photographer; but all, in some inscrutable way, were Struan, with the mark of his own character on them.

Jenny had grown up exceptionally free from training or mental direction of any kind. Her brother and her sister-in-law recognized the fact

that she was an alien, having nothing in common with them and their children. Being themselves dull and practical people, with far more consciousness of physical than of spiritual needs, they left Jenny to her own devices, and to such a system of morals as she might get from her own somewhat unaccountable nature and from the leadings of her teachers at school and Sunday-school, whom Jenny, more or less, despised.

So she was wonderfully free from trammels of every kind, both those from without and those from within, when she arrived in New York. She was not on the pinnacle of success; but she was high enough, after her dull, struggling life, to find her present position an almost dangerous eminence.

She was feeling a little giddy in consequence, when she opened her eyes the first morning in her quiet boarding-house, chosen chiefly for economy. Her spirit, however, was all undaunted, as she dressed herself for the great event of her first meeting with Struan. She had by nature a spirit, unconventional and unafraid, and had always gone far ahead of her companions, doing and venturing things which sufficiently accounted for her positive self-secure and, it must be owned, somewhat conceited little manner.

There was nothing of this manner in her now, however. She had sloughed it off, at her entrance to New York; and, at the thought of her meeting with Struan, she was almost pathetically humble. It was as much to Jenny as an audience with the king to a royalist. She knew that Struan had never been a public singer himself, but she knew that he was a power of whom public singers stood in awe. It was not that, however, which made her feel humble and timid for the first time in her life. Struan was said to be wilful, capricious, impulsive; hard and tyrannical or gentle and winning, as the case might be. But it was not this, either. She knew he was a big man, whose name and co-operation made any enterprise that depended upon public support a success. But it was not this. She knew, also, that he had certain great qualities of heart which made him of so prodigal a generosity to any friend in trouble that, more than once, it had practically impoverished him. In her narrow sphere, she had known nothing like any of these things; yet it was none of these that gave her such strange feelings now.

Jenny had carefully planned her costume for this occasion, telling herself that it was a matter of importance, since she hoped to be a public singer, that he should see her looking her best.

Now, as she dressed for this meeting, an insidious suggestion came to her mind that perhaps she was not so smart, seen in a city mirror, as she had seemed to herself at home. Was there not even something the least bit countrified in her appearance? This suspicion, in spite of her, made her feel like crying, and kept her heart rather heavy all the time that she was going down town in the street-cars. As she looked out of the window and eagerly compared herself to the girls who were walking on the street, the conviction deepened.

Her misgivings about her dress suggested others about her voice; and, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, she wished herself back at home, and felt that she could be content to remain in obscurity.

It was not in Jenny, however, to be cowardly. She rallied her forces, and put on a very resolute air, as she mounted the steps of the house of which she had come in search, and read on a small sign, among others fastened at the side of the door, the all-potent name of *Lucien Struan*.

She touched the bell, and stood waiting, with a trembling heart. A boy, preoccupied and indifferent in his manner, opened the door, and she asked if Mr. Struan was in. (How like a dream it was! Almost as if she had called at Olympus, and in-

quired of Ganymede for Jove.) The boy answered in the affirmative, but demanded whether or not she had an appointment. Having written the day before to say that she would call at this hour, she boldly replied that she had. The phlegmatic youth then led her down a long passage, and ushered her into a small reception-room, where she was requested to wait. She had given her card, and with it the boy disappeared.

In a moment he came back, said briefly that her card had been sent in, and then went his indifferent way, and left her there alone.

Jenny sat still and waited with a fluttering heart. Various sounds came to her, but all were strange, unsympathetic, uncongenial. Occasionally some one would hurry through the room, glancing at her inhospitably.

It seemed a very long while that she waited. It must have been more than an hour. After a while the boy who had admitted her passed through the room, without looking at her. When he came back, she asked him if Mr. Struan had received her card. He gave a careless affirmative reply, and went off down the long passage.

Still she sat and waited for a summons, which did not come. She began to feel that, if that door opened again for any one who passed her by in

this cold and heartless way, she should lose her self-command, and cry.

The door opened again. A man came in, with his hat on. At sight of her, he lifted it, mechanically, and would have passed on, but that he met her glance, and it arrested him.

The man's face was dark. It had deep lines and rugged contours. It looked, at this moment, slightly haggard, and as if concentrated on some perplexing thought. The eyes, steady and serious rather than large, were sunk deep under strongly modelled brows. He was older than she had expected to see him,—older, and not so handsome. But she knew him at once.

“Can I do anything for you?” he said, re-acting, as she saw, from the impulse which, at first sight of her, had urged him to hurry on.

For an instant she was totally unable to speak. The long and anxious time of waiting had strained her nervous endurance much. Added to this, the impression which she received from the man before her—an impression of power and importance—made her small claims to his attention seem unwarranted, and even absurd. She was humiliated to feel her eyes fill with tears.

Evidently, he noticed this.

“Come into my office,” he said kindly. “Did you wish to see me? I am Lucien Struan.”

She nodded, without speaking; and he led the way down a short passage, and opened a door at its end. There was a screen before this door; and, when she had walked round it, she found herself in a large room, with an office-desk covered with papers on one side of it and a grand piano on the other.

Going quickly to a table, he brought her a glass of water. She had been struggling hard for self-command, and with success. When she had swallowed the water and returned the glass to him, she was able to speak calmly.

"I am Miss Lacy,—Jenny Lacy," she said. "I wrote you a note yesterday, to say that I would call this morning at eleven."

A look of deprecation came into his face.

"I have to beg your pardon," he said. "I think I got the note, and I should have had it answered. I did not notice that it said to-day. Tell me what I can do for you."

"But I fear you haven't time"—

"One may always have time by taking it," he said. "My business now is with you."

"I wrote you," began Jenny, choking a little, "that I wanted to go on the stage, to be a public singer."

"Ah! did you?" he said, and she fancied an

inflection of disappointment in his voice. While she was wondering at this, he said abruptly,—

“Why?”

Jenny looked at him, puzzled.

“Why do you wish to become a public singer?” he said.

“Because,” she began, wonderingly,—“because I want to.”

“Is there any one depending on you for support or help?”

“No.”

“Is it necessary for you to make your own living?”

“No,” she said, “it’s not for that —”

“For what, then?” he said abruptly.

He looked searchingly into her eyes; but, as she did not at once reply, he turned, and said with a change of tone:

“But, first, we will try your voice.”

Going to the piano, he raised it, and motioned her to come to his side.

“What will you sing?” he said, seating himself.

She mentioned a song. It was one of his own compositions. He recognized the compliment by the briefest possible bow, as he struck the chords.

What a master touch! Already Jenny realized that it was different from anything she had ever heard before. It roused her to a change of mood, and she even suspected that the brief introduction which he played had its influence upon him as well. His powerful body swayed gently to the waves of sound, and his face showed also their soothing touch. At last, with the firm stroke of one finger, he sounded the resonant note for Jenny to begin.

At first, her voice trembled, and her recent emotion made it a trifle husky. But, as she went resolutely on, it cleared; and she knew that she was doing her best.

Breathlessly, she waited for him to speak. He did so with promptness and decision.

"You have a charming voice," he said — "not great, in any sense, but charming. Still, I do not advise you to go on the stage."

"Or even to sing in public?" she asked with a sinking heart.

"Or even to sing in public. Why should you?"

Jenny could not speak for the instant; and, as she was silent, he went on:

"If you had one of the great voices of the world, I should say that you owed a debt to your

generation ; but your voice, pretty as it is, is only one of many. Your place can easily be filled by substitute. I advise you to return to your home and the life you have left."

"I refuse!" cried Jenny, hotly. "I hate that stupid life." Then, feeling that she had lost control of herself, she added more calmly: "I don't want you to suppose that I had any ridiculous ideas about my voice, or thought myself likely to become a great singer. I was never so conceited. And, as to owing a debt to the world, I never talked any such nonsense to myself since I was born. I *have* thought that the world owed *me* something, and it's that that I am trying to get. Suppose my voice *is* only ordinary. I can improve it, or, at least, get an ordinary singer's position, provided I work hard and acquire a good method. That is what I came here to do. Will you give me lessons?"

The great man looked at her shrewdly for a few seconds. Then he said:

"My charges are high,—twenty dollars a lesson."

Jenny did not flinch.

"Will you teach me?" she said.

"How many lessons would you want to take?"

He had to lower his eyes, to prevent her seeing in them the amused consciousness of the fact that she was doing a sum in mental arithmetic.

Presently she said firmly :

“Fifteen.”

“That would not be enough,” he said.

“For the present it would. I’d come back next year.”

“And work for the money meanwhile, I suppose !”

She nodded, without speaking.

“You are determined, then ?”

“Yes, I’m determined. If you will not teach me, I’ll get some one else,—the next best.”

He hesitated just a moment. Then he said decidedly :

“If your mind is quite made up, I will teach you. But will you sit down a moment, and let me have a little talk with you ?”

Jenny took the chair to which he pointed, and he seated himself opposite.

“There are certain lessons which I might teach you,” he said, “and which I should like to teach you, that it would be far more to your advantage to learn than these singing-lessons that your heart is so set upon.”

“Yes,” she said, as if she thought she caught

his meaning, "I know well enough that there are other things in which I need instruction,— lessons in life, which I am as anxious to learn as I am to learn singing. I shall get both together here in New York. I cannot endure the narrowness of my life at home. I am sick of the stagnation of it. Life is slipping past me, and I've made no use of it. I am not willing to die before I have lived. The danger of that makes me wild."

"And what do you mean by 'living'?"

"Feeling!" she said, throwing out her hand with one of those gestures which had made her successful as a public reciter; for there was natural force and sympathy in it. "I have had nothing worthy to be called feeling in my life, unless it be the feverish desire to feel! I'd far rather suffer through feeling than not feel at all. It's all very well for you people who live in a world of action and movement to recommend quiet and repose to the rest of us, who have had it till we are sick of it. No, Mr. Struan, I shall not take your advice. I have worked for years to prepare myself for the stage, and I am not going to be balked by any tiresome ideas about prudence and discretion. I know what you would say, and of course I thank you very much for caring what becomes of me. All I ask of you now, however,

is to teach me to sing. Do that, and I'll take care of the rest. If I am only fitted for a second or third rate place on the stage, I'll take it, and make the most of it."

Struan's eyes were very penetrating. He fixed them on her now, as he said:

"There's no use, I suppose, in telling you that you will probably regret it?"

"None in the world. If I regret it, it will be my own regret. I shall trouble no one else with it."

"Advice would be wasted here, I see," said Struan. "So I will be wise, and refrain. You could never be made to believe now that the time may come when the thought of one hour's mental stagnation would be a dream of bliss to you. It is a heavier weariness to be tired of feeling than to be tired of not feeling, especially if it should so happen that feeling is mostly pain; and that may be, you know."

He got up then, and with a sudden show of hurry began to arrange the hours for the lessons.

They were to be twice a week, at this place, at ten in the morning. These details settled, he went with her through the long passage, and down to the door, where a cab stood waiting. Looking at his watch, he gave a little exclamation of sur-

prise, and sprang into the vehicle, telling the cabman to drive quickly to a given address.

After that first meeting, the great man's manner toward his young pupil changed. She found him a strict teacher, who rarely spoke, except to instruct, and who seemed quite to have lost sight of her as an independent individuality.

Jenny practised hard, and threw her whole soul into the effort to compel some expression of praise from him. Sometimes he would look as if he approved; but, as he said nothing, she began to think him obstinate. She could see that, under the marvellous instruction he gave her, she was making great progress; and she wondered if the time would ever come when he would tell her so.

One thing she had learned from outside report, and that was that he had shown an inexplicable exception in her favor by taking her as a pupil. She discovered, from various sources, that he had given up taking pupils, and that all applications, for a long time past, had been refused. This made her wonder whether her voice might not be better than he had allowed her to know. A more self-conscious woman than Jenny might have attributed his favoritism to personal interest; but that the god, whom he was in her eyes, should stoop to notice her from any other motive than

interest in her music never crossed her unsuspecting mind. It was as a being far removed from her sphere, and totally beyond her reach, that she thought of him. It greatly disturbed her, therefore, to realize that he was possessed by a very ungodlike spirit of sadness. Often she would go through a whole lesson preoccupied by this consciousness about him. As she stood a little back of him, while he played her accompaniments, she would look down upon his face, and fancy that she saw scored there the plain indications of sorrow. The eyes, which followed the notes automatically across the page, looked sometimes fierce and gloomy under the contracted brows. The rather short nose and firm mouth had, she imagined, a look of self-repression.

Jenny often wished that it were possible for her to express some sympathy for him, but she never for an instant conceived that this could be. Sometimes she did make the effort to put it into her voice; and she would then fancy, though he said nothing, that perhaps he felt it. She never dared hope, though, that he recognized any personal element in it. Indeed, it would have frightened her to have this so.

On one day she became certain that the currents of their feelings met, and flowed together. She

had brought a new song to sing for him, one that she had practised beforehand with great care.

When the song ended, however, he did not so much as look at her; but he said:

“I must tell you that I underestimated your voice. It is, as I said, not great; but it is very far beyond the mediocrity with which you once said that you would be content.”

“I said that only supposing I discovered that it was the best attainable, and I never ceased to hope for something better,” she said.

He did not answer, and the lesson ended there.

II.

TWO or three lessons went by, almost as devoid of any personal relationship between teacher and pupil as if both had been ingeniously constructed machines. Jenny felt that she was learning, as if by magic, but it irked her spirit a little that her master was so silent.

At last, one day, at the close of her lesson, Struan turned abruptly from the piano, and, throwing himself, in an impulsive way that he had, into a big chair, said :

“Sit down a moment. I want to speak to you.”

Jenny felt surprised. She gave no evidence of this, however, as she took her seat in the cane-backed revolving chair which stood before the desk, and wheeled herself round toward him. She had rolled her song into a slender tube, one end of which she put against her lips, with an instinct to protect herself from a possible betrayal, which might lie in their expression.

“I want to tell you,” said Struan, abruptly, “that I have it in my power now to get a good engagement for you.”

The girl's eyes showed a sudden fire.

"Not really?" she said. "But I haven't studied enough. I'm not equal to it."

"I am prepared to say that you are; and, if I say so, with the advantages which you possess in yourself, you can get the position. It is a good company, with an honorable and considerate management. If you are going on the stage, you could not do better."

"What do you advise?" she asked breathlessly.

"What I advised at first,—that you should give up the idea of the stage."

She grew very grave; and her voice sounded a little hard, as she said:

"I am not speaking of advice of that sort. I want your advice as my music-teacher."

"Then you don't value it as that of your friend?"

"I didn't know that you were my friend," she said with a suggestion of humility,—the first he had ever seen in her.

"I am, and I propose now to prove it. When this opportunity came, I thought, with some pride, of giving it to you; and I must tell you that I believe you could, with this company, make a hit, as they say."

"Ah!" she said, throwing up her chin and smiling at him half defiantly under lowered lids, and through long lashes: "that is what I should like,—to make a hit! It is the thing of all others which I have thought of with most delight."

She felt his gaze upon her turning cold, and imagined that it was because something in her mood jarred upon him.

"I wish you would agree to say nothing but the absolute truth to me in this talk,—as if you were on oath," he said. "Now do you mean what you have just said?"

His seriousness perplexed her, and made her also grave.

"Do I mean what?" she asked.

"Do you mean that the idea of making a hit on the stage is the thing which you have always thought of with most delight?"

"If I'm under oath," she said, looking away from him, and tapping restlessly on the desk with her roll of music, "I suppose I ought to qualify it by saying the *attainable* thing."

"If you would let me call myself your friend," he said, "I should like to ask what you mean by that. Just at this point of your life I should like you to give me the place and privileges of a friend,

for reasons which I will presently explain. Could you, without knowing me any better than you do, look upon me as your friend as well as your music-teacher?—for it is in both these positions that I must advise you now.”

“I am only too thankful to have you for my friend,” she said very simply and sweetly. “It is an idea that had not entered my head. I was slow in taking it in.”

“Then tell me, as your friend, what that unattainable thing is which you acknowledge that you have thought of with more delight even than making a hit on the stage.”

She felt herself blushing, and was annoyed at the discovery. She got up, without speaking, and went to the piano, where she leaned on her elbow, with her chin in her hand, and began to turn over some music at which she was not looking.

“Why don’t you answer me?” said Struan. “It is a matter of importance to me, as your friend. Otherwise I should not ask.”

“Oh, really,” she said with a little embarrassed laugh, “I couldn’t tell you that! I don’t want to say things which I should think silly afterward, and which you would think silly at the time.”

“If we are ever to get at what I am working

for, I see I shall have to help you," said Struan, in a practical and reassuring voice. "It's a simple thing, I imagine. Like every woman, you have had dreams of marriage, I suppose?"

Jenny quickly dropped her eyes.

"Like every silly school-girl, rather!" she said, with a little laugh. "Since I have been a woman really, I have put them by."

He got up, moving quickly, and crossed to the piano. Then, taking her by both her wrists, he led her, with an urgency which was almost force, back to her former place, and drew his own chair nearer, so that she could not avoid his direct and searching gaze, except by lowering her eyelids, which she did.

He waited a moment, and then said in a tone of authority:

"Look at me, young lady!"

For a few seconds more her eyes remained cast down, and she was ashamed to feel herself blushing again. When she presently looked up, however, she met a gaze so frank and unembarrassed that it quickly reassured her.

"You are at a point of your life," said her companion, "when you need a friend. Your own people, whoever they may be, seem to leave you strangely to yourself. The consequences of

this liberty may be very dangerous, though I see plainly that, up to this point, your freedom has been only an advantage to you. So far, you have used it well. You have not, however, been tried, as you are to be tried now ; and I am afraid to let you go through the ordeal alone. I intend to be to you, at this point of your life, the friend that you need. In order that I may do that, we must speak to each other very frankly. You must tell me, then, why you have put aside your dreams of marriage."

She returned his direct gaze with one of equal candor.

"Because I found that they were ridiculous," she said. "They were overstrained, sentimental, Utopian, and all the rest of it ! It's hard for me to realize it now, but I used to be exceedingly romantic."

"Used to be !" he said, smiling. "Why, your head's as packed with romance now as a rosebud is with perfume ! And why shouldn't it be ? Why should you ever have tried to prevent it ? I can assure you that romance is as alive in the world to-day as it ever was, and will continue to be the most living thing that there is, as long as human nature lasts ; that is, if what you mean by romance is the love between men and women."

He looked straight at her to see if she would wince under his plain speaking, but she took it perfectly simply.

“Don’t you believe me?” he said.

She nodded her head.

“Yes, I believe you,” she answered; “but what I don’t believe is that that is for me.”

“And why not for you?”

She shook her head backward with a childish motion of petulance.

“Oh, because,” she said, “the men who have called themselves in love with me have never made me feel anything but indignation and contempt. I’d rather be the grimmest sort of old maid, hard and thin and ugly, than become house-keeper to one of those creatures, with their limited ideas of love.”

His eyes were upon her with a look of kindly encouragement which took away all sense of embarrassment, as he said:

“You consider their ideas of love limited, do you? And yours, then,—how are they?”

“Do you want me to tell you, really?” she said. “You wouldn’t laugh at me?”

“Not for the world!”

“I think,” she said, feeling an impulse of delight in speaking out at last,—“I think my ideas

of love are unlimited, so long as it is real love. That seems to me the only thing that is worth sacrificing everything for,—ambition and everything. It's nothing for me to talk about it, as I've given up thinking of it for myself; but love means all that to me or it means nothing. Perhaps it would be truer to say that it used to mean all that, but now it means nothing."

"You will meet some one who will make it mean all that to you again," said Struan, suddenly.

Since he had forced her into the seat facing him, he had retained her hands in his, in the effort to compel her attention and to force her to meet his gaze. As he said these last words, she looked at him with a swift, astonished, half-frightened glance that pierced swiftly to his heart. He became suddenly conscious that he was holding her hands, then that the consciousness was sweet. He held them a second longer, while this sense quickened within him. Then he dropped them suddenly, and rose to his feet.

He crossed the floor, drank a glass of water, raised a blind to let in more light, and then, coming back, took the desk-chair which she had occupied at first, and resumed the conversation.

There was a change, however, in both his look and his tone, as he said :

“You will have to decide for yourself whether you will take the engagement I can secure for you or not. When you come to your next lesson, I shall expect you to be ready with your decision.”

“I am ready now. I accept it,” she said promptly.

“I cannot take any such hasty decision. You are ignorant of the dangers and temptations of the life that you would be entering upon, especially if you make a success.”

“I am not concerned about the temptations,” she said: “I am concerned only about the success.”

“You imagine yourself very strong!”

“No, I imagine myself weak, if tempted; but I am not likely to be tempted.”

“What do you mean by tempted? — tempted to do wrong?”

“What do you mean by doing wrong?” she astonished him by answering boldly. “There is no temptation that I dread except the temptation to take less than I want, in the way of love. That would be my idea of wrong, and I’m not afraid of doing that.”

“But you may meet a man who could give you, in marriage, all that you desire.”

“Yes, so I may! And so the skies may fall!”

Her manner, as she said this, forced a smile from him; but he went on in a business-like tone:

"I ought to lay before you these facts. Your engagement by this company is a first-rate chance for you. If you study hard, and do as well as I believe you can do, you ought to rise rapidly. But, if you get to the top, what is it? A name tossed about from lip to lip, with doubtful respect, if undoubted admiration; hard work day after day, and triumphs night after night, which would probably pall upon you soon; a good income, perhaps, to spend upon clothes and jewelry; and lovers or would-be lovers by the score."

"I don't mind the latter," she said; "and all the rest of the picture I like, even the work. Money to spend on clothes and jewelry is a thing I've longed for. Why not? It's very innocent."

"Yes," he said, his face half-sad and half-smiling, "it's innocent; but one soon comes to the end of that."

"Well, I want to come to the end of it, then!"

"You don't wish to be serious, I see."

"I am serious, I assure you. I mean exactly what I say. I don't want you to think me more than I am."

"I wish I knew exactly what you are. The advice which I had meant to give you, there seems somehow no place for. I meant to tell you of this opening, and then advise you, if you would be wise and prudent, to go back to the country, and marry there among your own people, rather than spend the bloom of your life a petted little singer of light comedy, and all the long remainder of it a prey to disappointment and regret."

"I haven't much opinion of life," she said bluntly. "It's all pretty bad, I fancy; and middle age and old age are bound to be so. If I can get something out of youth, I shall rejoice; for it's more than most do. But let me answer you," she added with a change of tone. "In the first place, my marrying any of the creatures—I won't call them men!—in the neighborhood of my home is out of the question. And your suggestion of the brief period of success upon the stage does not frighten me in the least. The fact that it was success would give me something pleasant to remember, and my old age would have less of regret in it than if I had lived the empty life of most of the girls I have known."

"You are decided, then, to take this engagement?"

"Quite decided. Thank you, very much."

"And you care nothing for the dangers which I have pointed out?"

"Nothing whatever, except that they may cause you some anxiety, seeing that you are my friend."

She looked at him with a softened light in her eyes, as she uttered these words.

"I will tell you what my hope for you will be, whatever your lot in life," he said. "It is in your truth to your ideal of love. When I see that you have no expectation of having that fulfilled, and that, realizing this as you do, you are unwilling to take less, I am comforted by the thought that this spirit in you may carry you safely on to the point of realization of your dreams."

As Jenny met his look fixed on her, she had a sense of being seen through and through, as she had never been before; but she felt no objection to such scrutiny.

"You don't understand me," she said seriously. "I'd rather you encouraged me in any delusion in the world than that one. I've fought that out, and got beyond it. I wouldn't have it raise its head again, for all the world."

"You are young to be a cynic. I am twice your age, old enough to be your father; and yet I have not such hopeless ideas of love."

"If you have ever known a completely happy marriage, where love was equal on the two sides, where it stood the test of time, and came up to your ideal of what love could be, then you have a ground for hopefulness which I have not. Have you ever known such a marriage?"

"I cannot say that I have."

"Have you ever known any credible witness who told you that they had known such a marriage?"

"No, I can't say that, either; but, still, I believe in its possibility."

"Then your faith in God and man is greater than mine, if, with every married couple you have seen as evidence to the contrary, you continue to believe."

"Given the conditions, I don't see why it should not be," he said. "I've never seen a marriage that offered the ideal conditions."

While he spoke, he observed that she was drawing on her gloves and collecting her sheets of music. She now stood before him, ready to go; and, as she looked up into his face, its expression smote her with a certain compunction. An impulse made her say gently:

"You have shown me such goodness and consideration that I don't know how to thank you."

Indeed, I do thank you with all my heart for being my friend. I'll tell you something: you are my only one, the only real friend I have. That will seem strange to you; but there has been no one in my life, so far, whom I've really cared to make a friend of. I've had to stand alone. I've had a hard fight for freedom and experience; but I've got them at last, in a way, as people do get what they will have. It's very good of you," she added, smiling, with a sort of meekness that was extremely winning, "to offer the treasure of your friendship to little me."

"And you are my friend also, are you not?" he asked. They had taken each other's hands to say good-by, and neither loosened the clasp as they stood there face to face.

"Oh, I *should* like to be!" she said; "but it seems so preposterously unlikely that you should need my friendship or want it."

"I need it, and I want it. I am not a happy man, and there are not many things that could help to make me so; but to have your friendship would be one of these."

Struan was innocent as the day of any intention of charming this young girl or awakening in her heart any feeling beyond the friendliness which he asked for; but he could not help it that his eyes

upon her face were enthralling to her senses, and his touch upon her hand no less so. He did not know with what a halo of young romance and worshipful admiration this youthful creature had so long invested him. He could not judge of the influence of that fact in the present circumstances. She had never given one sign of the feeling for him which a thousand women had urged upon him, to his shrinking and distaste.

As for Jenny, the thing now uppermost in her heart was the thought that he was unhappy. It seemed to signify little that a mere nobody like herself should be so ; but how different it was with this godlike creature ! It seemed hard beyond endurance that he should not have whatever happiness it was that he desired.

Struan interrupted her thoughts by saying quietly :

“And are you going to promise to be my friend ?”

An impulse seized her. Without another thought, she raised herself on tiptoe, and kissed his cheek. He half caught her to him, and then, in a flash, released her, and she slipped away.

“That was sweet of you, dear,” she heard him say reassuringly, as she let herself out of the room.

III

POOR Jenny! That second's impulsiveness cost her days and nights of suffering.

What would he think of her, and what had made her do it? He could only think that she was vulgar and fast and ridiculously conceited. Deeply as she searched her mind, she could find but two motives for this impulsive act,— she was sorry and she was affectionate. These two feelings, which his words to her had quickened, had led to a sudden act, with which neither thought nor judgment had anything to do.

But this he did not know, and perhaps he might think that she had dared — ! She couldn't bring herself to put it into words, but the very thought of his conceiving her to be guilty of such an assumption made her wretched to the bottom of her soul.

When the time for her next lesson came, she stayed away. She felt that she must brace herself to go on with her purpose, and, after this one interval, she would do it; but this one she felt to be necessary.

It was a most unhappy morning; and, when the

usual hour had come and gone, she began to repent what she had done. It might look as if she imagined that he would attach some importance to her comings and goings.

She was sitting alone in her little boarding-house bedroom, feeling very desolate, when a servant came up to say that a gentleman wanted to see her. She knew no gentlemen, and never had visitors. Who could it be? Neither card nor name had been sent up. A thought flashed through her mind, but she rejected it as impossible. A person so great and important had neither the time nor the interest to take this long journey up town for the sake of seeing her. It must of course be some one else.

But it was not some one else. It was Struan himself, looking peculiarly out of place in the common little parlor, which his vivid personality seemed somehow to transform into a sort of dream place. It looked totally unlike what it had seemed before.

He came to meet her with the kindest smile.

"You poor, imprisoned birdling, is this your cage?" he said, giving her his hand, and bending on her a glance that had a nameless power in it. "After a life in the country, such a place must seem intolerable. It makes me realize the pluck

you've got." Then, with a change of tone and an intensifying of that direct gaze, he added :

"Why didn't you come to your lesson? I came to see if you were ill."

"No, I'm not ill," she said, "only — only — lazy," she ended, after floundering for a word.

"Lazy! You haven't a lazy bone in you! You ought to have said 'only foolish.' But, whatever it was, you look a little pale. I'm going to take advantage of this lovely spring day, and give both you and myself a holiday. In the first place, I'm going to take you to the music hall, and try your voice. It's important, just at this point, to do that. Afterward we're to go to the park. I've announced myself off for the day. So put on your hat."

Jenny's heart throbbed at the thought, but she stood irresolute.

He saw it, and said quickly :

"If you hesitate, I shall think that you distrust me."

Then she went, without a word.

She was ready in a very few minutes,— a vision of lovely youthfulness, in her smart spring frock, with a pretty jacket, which clothed her slight figure as if lovingly. Her small hat had a pair of bird's wings in it, set apart, like a Mercury's cap.

Still feeling herself a figure in a vision, she got with him into a cab ; and they were driven rapidly through the sunny streets, in the balmy air of early spring-time.

On and on they went, through streets crowded with business and others crowded with fashion. Fifth Avenue was swarming with carriages, many of them open and filled with charmingly dressed women. Occasionally they would pass a flower-shop on the pavements, in front of which long-housed plants were blooming and swaying in the pleasant air. Most conspicuous among these was one with tall branches covered with a feathery yellow bloom that caught the sunshine with a radiant glow. The vines which veined the stone or brick surfaces of the houses showed in a thousand places little buttons and puffs of green. The windows were decorated with banks of growing plants, chiefly many-colored pansies, riotous with bloom. Every smart-looking man that they passed had a flower in his buttonhole ; and the lovely women, on foot and in carriages, had bunches of jonquils or lilac in their hands or fastened to their dresses.

Jenny felt herself a part of it all,—one of the happy dream-figures which the coming of ordinary daylight would prove to be unreal.

After a while their cab turned, and they stopped before the entrance to the big music hall.

It at once appeared that Struan was well known here; and, when he asked to be allowed to go into the great hall to try this young lady's voice, permission was immediately given. He went in front of her along the dark passage that led to the stage. Once, where it was very dark, he took her hand and led her. She felt, in his touch and in his guidance, a sense of safety that was something new and delicious to her.

In a moment the darkness was passed, and they had come out on the big stage and were facing the vast empty room, with its innumerable seats below and its tiers of boxes, row over row, above.

It seemed to Jenny that she was the merest atom of humanity, and the thought of singing to that immense room filled with critical and unsympathetic people gave her a prevision of stage-fright which made her pale and tremble.

"Isn't this fine?" said Struan, in his strong, firm voice, turning to look about him. "Most singers say they feel like paying for the privilege of singing in this hall. How does my little singer feel?"

"Oh, frightened!" said Jenny, tremulously, "—frightened and disheartened and depressed. I

don't believe that I could ever sing in a place like this."

"I still have hopes that you may not, though it seems almost useless hoping against such a will as yours. As for the fright, however, that can be overcome. I propose now to go and stand in the centre of the hall, and let you play your own accompaniment and sing to me. You are not afraid of such an audience as that, are you?"

"No, not of you, but of the place. It's so big and gloomy and unsympathetic."

"So the place may be, but the audience isn't,—at least, not unsympathetic, however big and gloomy. But here's a thought to encourage you. You will, for once, be singing under circumstances in which the entire audience is your devoted friend. That ought to cheer you up. Come, now, shake hands, and take courage!"

It did indeed put courage into her to feel the grasp of his warm, strong fingers. She turned to the piano and played a soft prelude, watching his retreating figure as it lessened down the great central aisle. The absolute silence between them, above them, all about them, had something mysterious in it; and the thought that they were the only beings in that usually crowded place gave to each a like sense of companionship and sympathy.

Supported by this feeling, Jenny lifted her voice and began to sing. After the first few bars her notes were clear and steady. She knew, when she ended, that she had given a fair test of what it was possible for her to do. She realized that her voice did not fill the hall; but it did well for a mediocre one, so she told herself.

Struan clapped his hands gently; and, as he came toward her down the aisle, he waved her a sign of encouragement. When he was at her side upon the stage, he said cordially:

“Very good, indeed! I congratulate you. If you want that engagement, you can get it and fill it. There’s no longer any doubt about that. Do you still want it?”

Jenny bowed her head. A sudden sense of depression had seized her in spite of her success. It was unaccountable.

“More than you want anything else?” said Struan.

“More than I want anything that I’m likely to get.”

“I wonder if you really know yourself.”

“Absolutely. Of that there is no possible doubt.”

“Yet I doubt it. But sit down there, on the corner of the director’s stand, and let me play to

you a little. I have never played to you yet, have I?"

"No. I have often longed to ask you, but I did not feel that I could take up your time."

"Nonsense! I've never been so busy yet but that I could have played to you. However, I'm going to do it now. Remember, I am not a great musician, though some good authorities have declared to the contrary. Fortunately, I have known my limitations, and all the vast amount of work and study which I have put into it have made me a good theorist and director. My playing, however, is no better than may be met with pretty much every day. Still, I am not without hope that I can play so as to please you now."

Jenny had seated herself on the corner of the little wooden platform, and clasped her hands about her knees. Struan sat down on the piano-stool, and began to play very softly.

From time to time he looked at her. Once they both smiled, not mirthfully, but with a comprehension of the unsaid things between their two minds. Helped by the music, that exchanged smile told each that there was much in the heart of the other which would like to utter itself.

Sometimes, as he played on, he bent upon her a look of absorbed contemplation, the subject of

which seemed to be not so much herself as a certain abstraction of her which he had in his mind. Then again he would look at her quite differently, until she felt that, when their eyes met, their thoughts and souls met, too.

And all these looks that passed between her eyes and his were accompanied by that ebb and flow of profoundly beautiful music. He played with the ease of a master, so that one almost lost sight of the contact between the player and the instrument, and could imagine that he expressed himself as if with another voice. He scarcely looked at the keys, but kept his eyes, for the most part, upon Jenny, who sat with lowered lids. Once, mingling with a harmony of deep, sweet chords, came the sound of his voice.

“Jenny,” he said distinctly.

She raised her eyes to his.

The music ceased.

“I was thinking,” he said, “how often I had stood upon that little dais, directing an orchestra, and that every time I did so, in the future, I should seem to see you sitting there, just on that left-hand corner, as you are doing now. Where will you be then, I wonder?”

A gush of sadness, sweeping across her heart, made Jenny spring suddenly to her feet, possessed

by a sense of fear which she did not herself understand.

He got up, too, and closed the piano.

"My dismal playing has made you sad," he said. "Come, we will go now. This little play is played out."

They both laughed, with a sense of relief at having the strain broken. As they returned through the long dark passage, he did not again give her his hand, but said merely :

"You know your way back, don't you ?"

And she answered :

"Yes, perfectly," and that instant stumbled, and would have fallen if he had not caught her. At this they both laughed again, and so emerged into the bright light of day.

When they were in the cab, he gave orders that they should be driven to the entrance of the park.

As they were going along, Jenny said :

"I haven't thanked you for your playing or told you how I enjoyed it."

"No, by the way, so you haven't ! I hadn't noticed the omission. Pray proceed."

Jenny laughed and blushed, and said nothing.

"I am waiting," said Struan.

"How absurd !" said Jenny. "Nothing is more stupid than to try to express yourself in

words to some one who understands much better without them."

"Profoundly true, and on that principle I have not tried to thank you for your song."

"Oh, my singing!" said Jenny, airily. "That sort of thing can be nothing to you. It's enough if you put up with it."

"You are wrong," said Struan, gravely. "I should love it much under circumstances which I can imagine, but these circumstances are not represented by the stage. I'll tell you this for your comfort, however. If I could succeed in separating your voice from you, I should be heartily charmed with it on the stage."

Jenny felt, in her heart, that this commendation was even more than she could have asked.

They drove on after this in silence, until they reached the entrance to the park. There Struan stopped the cab and dismissed the driver.

"You would not believe that there are quiet, sheltered spots in this great public place, would you?" he said, as they walked along. "There are, however; and I propose to show them to you."

Very often, in their passage through the crowd, people bowed to him. Sometimes these were men on foot or on horseback, and sometimes charming

women, in carriages. Jenny thought she perceived an unusual cordiality in these glances, as though his friends were really glad to see him. Then it occurred to her that it might only be a reflection of the cordiality with which he greeted them. She had never seen a man whose face and manner so expressed good will.

When they had gone further yet, past the great metal beast couchant in the leafless bushes, past the lake and the boat-house, and out of sight of the prying eye of Cleopatra's Needle, they turned into a side path, where the breath of spring-time pervaded the air, unmingled with the scent of dust and crowds. Farther away from houses and people did they go, and nearer to hillsides and verdure, until they were in a spot shut off from outside observation. Here on a sloping bank, under tall trees, Struan paused.

"We will sit down awhile if you please," he said. "Isn't it quiet and country-like and sweet here?"

"Delicious," said Jenny, as she accepted the seat which he had made for her by folding the light overcoat which he had carried on his arm, and placing it at the foot of a large tree.

"Are you comfortable?" he asked, looking at her with a smile of pleasant consciousness, as he

seated himself on the grass, a little lower down the slope of the hillside.

“Perfectly, except about you. I am afraid you will take cold, sitting on the ground.”

“It’s quite dry, I assure you; and, besides, I never take cold. I have the most indomitable health. Nothing seems to hurt me. I suffer from sleeplessness at times, and my nerves get all awry, but never anything more than that. May I light a cigar?”

As Jenny acquiesced and sat watching him, she became aware that a certain change had come over him. His manner had lost its friendly familiarity. It was reserved, and almost cold. When he had smoked in silence for a few minutes, he looked at his watch.

“We have a good hour yet,” he said, “before it will be necessary for us to leave, in time to get you across your threshold in broad daylight. I left word that I was to be absent all day, so I am free of engagements. You are willing to sit here with me for an hour, are you not?”

“Willing!” exclaimed Jenny, with a sort of reproach in her voice. She was surely a naïve creature, and her naturalness was the very quality to make the strongest possible appeal to Struan. So he looked at her now with a smile as spontaneous as her tone had been, and said:

"I wonder if you know how unlike other people you are, and how the very fact refreshes me."

Jenny blushed with pleasure.

"I don't know what I am," she said; "and, so long as you like me, I don't care."

The bluntness of the avowal evidently did not displease him.

"We are friends, real friends," he said kindly, "are we not?"

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! If you will let me be," said Jenny, clasping his proffered hand in both her own.

"Let you, my child! I want you, I need you for my friend. You are a trustful, confiding creature, who may need my friendship; and it shall not fail. I hate to say it, but I fear that life will prove to you that you are too trustful."

"You are wrong," she said quickly, dropping his hand. "I am not so to every one. I can take care of myself better than you imagine. But with you I could never feel anything but absolute trust."

"I must see to it that you have no reason to regret it," he said, "the more so as your knowledge of me is, I suppose, extremely limited. I wonder how much you do really know," he added with a smile.

"I know enough. I know everything," she said impulsively, "in knowing you as you are."

"My child, you know little, too little, to rest any reasonable trust upon; and so all the world would tell you. You have a habit, I see, of trusting your intuitions. It will not always do. But tell me this. What do you know of my life, my circumstances, my family ties,—anything at all?"

"Very little," she said. "I found out years ago that you were married and had a son,—that was when I first knew about you. I have never heard anything since."

"You didn't know, then, that my wife was dead?" he asked.

"No," said Jenny, quietly, as if the matter did not deeply concern her. She had, in fact, never thought or cared whether he was married or unmarried. She only wanted him as a divinity to worship; and he answered that purpose equally well, either way. Of course, it went without saying, in her candid little heart, that she would have married him with rapture if she had had the opportunity; but it had never crossed her mind that such a thing was possible to her humble life.

In the silence that followed her last word, she felt that Struan looked away from her. So she bent her eyes upon his face, and was impressed

anew with its look of sadness. Instantly a throb of sympathy thrilled to her heart. It was, perhaps, grief for the loss of his wife that made his face look so.

"Oh, I *am* sorry for you! I do pity you," she said fervently.

Instead of softening under her look and tone of melting sympathy, his face seemed to harden. She could not understand it, but she went on in much the same tone. "I might have known that you had had some great sorrow in your life," she said. "I did know it. I have felt it since the first moment I saw you."

A slight frown gathered on her companion's face.

"You misunderstand," he said hastily, as if to prevent her going on. "I have had great sorrow in my life, but it is not what you suppose."

"I know nothing. I do not ask to know. I have not even the right to suppose at all. Only it seems to me that the worst troubles only come into people's lives through marriage."

"You are very near the truth there, I think," he answered; "and it has been through marriage that my worst trouble has come."

Jenny was silent a moment. Then she said in her simple, blunt way,—

"I don't understand."

"Of course not. How should you?"

There was a certain wistfulness in his voice, a certain hesitation, as if he dallied with an idea which had a temptation for him. While this dubiousness was in his heart and in his eyes, Jenny's voice said with a frank alluringness:

"Tell me about it."

He started slightly.

"Tell you about it!" he said. "Why should I?"

"Because I am your friend," she said. "Why should you not?"

"It is a thing I have never spoken of to any human soul."

"Why?" she said with a direct abruptness very characteristic of her.

"Because I have never felt that I could speak of it to any one."

"But you feel so now," she said with conviction.

Both words and manner startled him. They were so absolutely the expression of what he felt within him,—a sudden, strong possession by a totally new impulse and desire.

He was aware of a great longing to utter to this girl the secrets so long locked tight within his

breast,—to knock down barriers, as with a sudden, irresistible impetus, and lay bare to her eyes the thoughts and feelings he had shared with none. Her absolute unconventionality, her ignorance of life and the forms of the world, attracted him powerfully. The pure nature of her, the simplicity which made her say, "Why should you not?" impelled him to echo her question.

"Why should I not?" he said aloud, with a certain eagerness in his voice; and the next instant he added, "I will!"

She waited expectantly, but he did not speak at once.

Presently he said:

"You will not think me presumptuous to assume that you will be interested in my long story? It will not bore you?"

Jenny's direct gaze seemed to concentrate, until it looked him through and through.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" she said.

The question searched for his inmost consciousness, and found it.

"Yes," he said almost humbly, "I am." Then he added, "Shall I tell you the plain, unvarnished truth?"

She made an impatient gesture, as if begging him to hurry.

“I was scarcely more than a boy when I married,” he said. “That may have had something to do with it, but not much. We were both too young to know our own minds, and I had just the temperament to make a fatal mistake in marriage. Why she married me, poor girl, I do not to this day understand; for, although she had a certain affection for me, she never loved me. Possibly, she was not aware of this fact till she made the discovery after marriage, when I made it, also. I was very young, and, at first, was totally unable to account for the unhappiness in which we both found ourselves plunged. Now, after twenty years more experience of life, I understand the matter better. I was passionate, romantic, impulsive; and I had believed that I loved this woman supremely, and should get from her an equal return of the intense feeling which I had to offer her. Before long, however, I found that she was absolutely incapable of it,—that her nature was the very opposite of mine. We lived on in misery and misapprehension of one another year after year. It was within the first year of our marriage that our only child was born, and on this boy both our hearts became fixed. I soon proved anew the radical difference of our natures. While to me it seemed, as it ever

must, that the love of father for child is a secondary and inferior thing to the love of husband for wife, to her it was evident that maternity was the supreme feeling. She lavished upon this child the devotion and the endearments for which I had been starved, though even before the baby's birth I had been thrust back upon myself so persistently that my love had greatly cooled. This, instead of grieving her, was so manifestly to her taste that pride came in, and rendered me colder still. Life was almost intolerable on these conditions. I was too young to accept willingly the idea of renunciation. I thirsted for the fulness of life, and it seemed to me that fate had miserably duped me. After long struggling with the hardness of the conditions about me, I spoke to her about getting a divorce."

As he uttered the last word, he looked at his companion, to judge of its effect on her.

"Well," she said impatiently, "go on."

"The idea of divorce, then, does not shock you,—does not go against your feeling of right? I should like to know your judgment on this point."

"Oh, what does that matter?" she said, impatient of the interruption. "I have never thought about the question. I've never had to. But I

can tell you this. It doesn't go against my feeling of right as much as marriage without love does, I don't care what *anybody* says! I know that to be wrong from my own heart and soul, or whatever the highest part of me is."

Struan looked at her with undisguised pleasure in his eyes.

"It's a rare thing," he said, "to talk to a woman who has the courage of her opinions, and a still rarer thing to find one whose opinions are of her own making, as yours evidently are."

He paused, arrested by the fact that Jenny was not interested in what he was saying and scarcely restrained her impatience for him to return to his story.

"What did she say to the divorce?" she asked eagerly.

"I can hardly describe to you her absolute terror at such an idea. It was something pitiable to see. She sobbed, and pleaded with me far more passionately, I am sure, than she would have done for her life. She declared that she could not and would not bear it, that she would kill both herself and the child first. Of course, under these conditions, I could not have got a divorce, even if I would; and I no longer entertained the idea. She was very delicate, poor thing; and I could not

have had the cruelty to persist in a thought which so tortured her.

"Afterward I made an effort to find out the real secret of her abject terror of the divorce idea. Much of it, I found, was what is called, in religious parlance, 'human respect.' Her dread of the world and its comments was in direct proportion to my indifference to it. Well, at all events, I had to give it up," he said, shifting his position, and drawing a deep sigh, while at the same time he pushed his hat back a little from his forehead, as if the constraint of it hampered him in the freedom of this talk.

"And your son?" said Jenny, as if afraid of his lapsing into silence,— "what of your son?"

Surely there was something in the heart of Lucien Struan akin to the sunshine. His face was capable of expressing a radiance that was almost startling. Jenny had never seen that look upon his face before; but now, on seeing it, she answered it with a laugh.

"Ah, how you love him!" she said ardently.

"Ah, how you understand me!" he answered, as if in gratitude. "I have had a miserably deprived and disappointed life," he went on. "It is a relief to admit it in words at last. I have been thwarted in all the strongest impulses of my

nature, denied in all the tenderest desires of my heart, except in one thing only,—where that boy of mine is concerned. There I have had fulfilment, fruition, satisfaction.”

“Tell me about him,” said Jenny, simply as a child listening to a story.

“His name is Leonard.”

“Leonard!” she said, as if testing the sound, “I like it.”

“He is nineteen years old. Think of it! Almost as old as when I made that marriage, so fatal to us both; for she, poor woman, suffered much as well. And, in addition to her sorrow and regret, she had permanent, chronic ill-health, while I was unconscious of what illness meant. I want never to forget that. I am sure that to this cause was due the change which took place in her feelings toward Leonard. When he grew out of babyhood, he soon manifested a great devotion to me; and, as he was very strong and very intelligent, I was able to take him into my life a great deal, and have him much about me. Perhaps his evident preference for my company hurt his poor mother, or perhaps the increased nervous strain of her long illness made her impatient of a child’s noise and restlessness. Whatever it was, she changed toward him; and a sister who lived with her

came, in time, almost to take a mother's place to him. The boy seemed to fret and worry her, and she was evidently relieved when I suggested sending him off to school. After that he only saw her occasionally, as she grew more and more delicate and nervous; and it was with her entire consent that three years ago I sent him abroad to the school where I had been."

"And he is there now?"

"Yes. I went over last summer, and we travelled together for a month or so. He is a glorious young being," he said ardently. And it was in the same tone that Jenny answered:

"Oh, he must be, for you to love him so!"

Struan felt a strange sense of comfort. His companion's sympathy enclosed him like an atmosphere.

"Even to you," he went on presently, "I cannot tell the wretchedness of those years of marriage,—a marriage that was no marriage, its whole basis and structure being false. Poor Rachel! She never, even in dreams, caught a glimpse of the feeling upon which real marriage rests. For a while I sank into the hopeless belief that the feminine nature could never comprehend or respond to the masculine, and that all women were like her. It was a dangerous hour for me when I found out my mistake."

He tossed away the end of his cigar, and drew himself into a more upright position.

"I was rescued from that danger, however," he went on, "and from others which followed it. My fatal mistake was in marrying so young, before I could know what I wanted or could judge what a woman was able to give. I was meant for marriage and domestic life. I could have been happy in it; and, more than that, I could have given happiness. The realization that I was cut off from it completely has been the regret, the pain, the tragedy, of my life."

"Great heavens!" said Jenny, locking her hands together tight, and pressing them, so clenched, hard against her breast. "You say I understand you; and so, up to a certain point, I did: but not now. I fail utterly to comprehend such a course in man or in woman."

"What course? What do you mean?"

"Why, *letting* yourself be cut off from happiness, *submitting* yourself to any conditions that did cut you off from it. Great heavens!" she said again, and this time with an inflection as of scorn. "If *I* had a chance of happiness, such happiness as it is in *you* to *command*, I'd have it; and I'd pay the cost."

Struan looked at her with intense interest. He

felt that here was a woman who was revealing her very inmost self. It was a rare insight for a man to have ; and it whipped up strangely his zest for the investigation of the life-motives and heart-problems which had always so interested him, an interest which, of late years, had begun to flag. The reason for this was, in great part, because of the conventionality which made most men and women strive to realize what was demanded by the world without them rather than the soul within them. Here, he felt, was an exception to this rule. This knowledge was intensely precious to the psychic consciousness which was so large an element in him ; and the fire in his eyes now, as he sat upright and looked at Jenny, was kindled by this feeling more than by any other.

There was fire in the eyes of Jenny, too, from whatever cause it came.

“ I have no regrets of that sort in *my* life, thank heaven ! ” she said. “ I have nothing to reproach myself with, because I’ve never had any chance. But you ! Great heavens ! — what you might have had ! — what you have missed ! ”

Her words and looks worked on him strongly, quickening into keener life the sense of loss, denial, deprivation, which had so become a habit with him that he was usually unconscious of it.

"Yes," he said, "I might have had it; and I have missed it."

"*I would* have had it. *I would not* have missed it. And, in your place, I would have it yet."

The fervor of her spirit heightened mysteriously the beauty of her face and figure. She looked the very epitome of youthful fire and feeling, bound up in an outward form of such charming hues and curves as brought to Struan's heart once more a sweet and sudden breath of the wild freshness of morning.

"Tell me," he said eagerly,—“tell me what you would have done. Tell me what you would do.”

"What I would have done? I would have broken those shackles that bound me to a being who was not my mate! I would have felt that I degraded her and degraded myself in preserving such a bond!"

"And what of the comments of the world?" he said.

He was studying her with an acute interest, and he awaited almost breathlessly her answer to his questions.

"The world? Pooh!" she said with an accent of scorn. "What does the world care for me? As little as I care for it!"

There was something in this point of view which made a strong appeal to him. It was so great a contrast to that of his wife. He knew that the strained conditions of their marriage had weighed like lead upon her,—that she would gladly have been free and given him his freedom but for the all-importance of this factor of the world's criticism.

“But you are putting yourself in my place, remember,” he said in answer to her last words. “I could not pretend to the obscurity which is so often a boon. I had put myself in a public position before the world, and so challenged its attention. I was well known, and the fact has a certain responsibility with it. How then?”

“The same!” she said, looking him bravely in the eyes. “Were I like you, nothing,—*nothing* should deprive me of my heritage of joy; and I mean by that joy in love.”

She said it unblushingly; and the contrast with the woman who had despised love as low and lowering, and with whom he had for years combatted that idea in vain, made a strong appeal to him.

“But it's useless,” she went on, a faint, faint tremor in her voice, which some subtle comprehension conveyed to his soul rather than to his

ears. "I cannot put myself in your place. You are a man, and must look to your career. I am a woman, and a woman's career is love."

The words thrilled him, spoken with the courage and the fervor that sounded in the voice of this beautiful young thing; for in this moment Jenny looked no less than beautiful.

"Then you value personal joy more than general good?" he asked, half-smiling.

"I value love beyond everything," she said.

Strange how that reckless, ruthless answer pleased him! He had fancied that the question, so put, would perhaps force her into a conventional answer. And, when she answered as she did, he gave a little laugh, as if he revelled in the courage of her.

The sound of that laugh recalled him to himself. He realized that he had been strangely off his guard. He shifted his position, moving downward on the grass, so as to be a little below her and further away; and he turned so that only his profile was toward her.

For some minutes he sat so, looking before him in silence. He had taken off his hat; and his hair, dark and short, was a little dishevelled. His deep-set eyes had an alert, keen-visioned look, which gave to his face an expression of intense

vitality. His nose, straight, strong, and rather short, showed a slight distention of the nostril; and his jaw was set in a way that made his lower lip protrude a trifle beyond the upper. His mouth was firmly compressed under the short dark mustache. His whole expression and attitude indicated an excited self-control.

Jenny looked at him; and, as she looked, she worshipped. It was an old feeling with her now. She had worshipped him for years, before she ever saw him; and sight and knowledge of him had vastly added to this feeling. But now, to-day, something new was stirring in her breast,—a thing that made her pulse-beats fast and her breathing thick, and seemed to stretch and expand her heart with a sweet, delicious ache. She sat still and acquiescent, giving herself up to this new and poignant feeling, offering no barriers of question or doubt to its entering in and taking full possession of her.

He was not looking at her. Perhaps it would have made no difference if he had been. Her eyes were as free and willing as her spirit. She had no thought of forbidding them to look what she felt. The sweet, bewildering pain that had possession of her was something she had never felt before; but every pulse and nerve within her yielded to it, wooed it, rejoiced in it.

Unconscious of her fervid gaze, the tension of Struan's face seemed every second to increase. There was evidently some strong feeling at work in him, and he felt the necessity of constraint as Jenny felt the instinct of freedom.

Those few moments seemed a long, long while that he forbade himself to look at Jenny, and she indulged herself in looking to the full at him.

She looked intently, scrutinizingly, piercingly, as it were, noting every detail, in the actual hunger of her gaze. The dark hair, sprinkled with gray; the broad brow, lined with many a mark of care; the lowered eyes, rigidly fixed and controlled; the firm nose, with the nostril that yet trembled slightly; the set lips, that yet faintly quivered; the strong jaw, so compressed that the strained muscles within moved under the flesh as the locked teeth were pressed together harder and harder,—all these she saw with a mingling of love and longing that suddenly escaped her in a little cry.

It was no articulate word; but no word ever invented by man could have so expressed her, so uttered the passion in her heart, so matched the fire of her gaze.

Its effect upon Struan was as if electric. He sprang to his feet; and, as if by one impulse, she

was standing, too. And so they looked at each other face to face.

Away with shackles then! His eyes had got free in a twinkling, and they met and reflected hers, which, by the reflection of his, glowed ever brighter and bolder. But his hands, stretched straight and rigid at his side, still answered to what remained to him of purpose and control.

The next instant Jenny had reached forth and caught them in her own; and, at the softness of her touch, they softened, too, and let themselves be clasped and pressed. She would have drawn him closer; but there was a vestige of resistance left, and he hardened his muscles to remain where he was.

She seemed to understand the effort; but it only made her laugh,—a gay, bewildering laugh, that showed her red lips parted and her dazzling teeth.

“What’s the use?” she said, and gently tried again to draw him to her.

Physically she was weak as a child compared to him; but he felt himself yielding, and moved toward her a short step or two.

“You know the truth,” she said, her radiant face so close beneath his own that he felt her whispered breath upon his cheek.

“What?” he said, as one bewildered.

“That we love each other.”

At the words the light that burned within his eyes flared up and blazed upon her. She could not bear the radiance of it. It was too insupportably sweet. She threw her arms around his neck, and closed her dazzled eyes against his throat.

The next instant all had changed. She was resting upon him, weak and pliant, while over her face, her eyes, her lips, his kisses fell, and round her trembling form his strong arms clung, as if they would let her go from him no more forever.

To Jenny, in spite of all her courage of love, this was a new and mighty wonder; and she was as if in a trance of bliss,—how long she did not know,—until she felt herself resting, contented and quiet, in his arms.

Then consciousness of all came back upon her like a wave; and she knew what this meant to each of them.

The shadows were gathering. She felt safe and happy in his arms, but she wondered that he kept so still.

She moved her head against his shoulder and sighed, pressing him gently with the arm that was half about him.

“What is it?” he whispered.

“I love you so!” she said.

"Ah, my child," he answered, in a voice that she did not wholly understand.

"What is it?" she whispered in her turn, lifting her head to look into his face through the gathering dusk. "Do you not love me?"

"I do. So help me, God! It is my only excuse," he answered.

"Excuse? What do you want with an excuse? You speak as if it were an injury to me to love me." And she breathed a little mocking laugh.

"That is my fear," he said.

"Then away with it!" she cried, snapping her pretty fingers, and drawing herself upright so that she stood a little apart from him. "There is no place or room for fear, if you love me," she said.

He stepped backward a pace also.

"I do love you," he said again. "Judge yourself how much I love you, when it has broken through with the habit of restraint of all these years! I am over forty years of age, and I thought myself completely self-controlled; but this love for you, which has leapt up so suddenly in my heart, has made me like a child before you. There is no doubt that I love you, Jenny; but I must get time to think. I have been unpardonably, unprecedentedly rash. Thought, judgment,

reason, have had nothing to do with my conduct. I do not know myself as I am now. You must give me time to think; and, when I have done so, we must speak together, but not now. I am not equal to it now."

Jenny felt a sudden sense of doubt and fear.

"Speak together?" she said. "Of course, we must speak together; but what is there to say that can alter anything? When I say I love you, that means all. Oh, if you *do* love me,—if you are not deceiving me —"

Her voice broke, and he could see her tremble. Irresistibly impelled, he moved toward her again; and she threw herself with abandonment upon his breast, and clung with both arms to him.

"Oh, my love, my love, my love!" she said. "I have never loved a man before, and everything except this love counts as nothing to me. Whether you take me or leave me, I am yours,—yours forever!"

Her lips moved against his throat, and her arms tightened about him. He could feel her warm breath and the throbs of her bounding heart. He stood still for some seconds, his purposes and resolutions slipping from his mental grasp. Once it seemed as if he were about to recover them, but Jenny's sweet lips moved again. He felt as well as heard them as they said:

"I am yours,—to take me or leave me, as I said. And you are mine, my own, my own, my own!—my hero, my master, my friend, my ideal,—my first and only love!"

Suddenly she drew away from him, until her eyes could pierce the gloom dividing them. For some seconds they rested so; and then their faces moved toward each other, and they kissed. It was the kiss of a solemn and acknowledged passion.

When he released her, they stood at arms' length, holding each other's hands.

Struan was the first to speak.

"God forgive me," he said. "What is it I have done?"

"Made my happiness and your own," she said. "What is it that you fear?"

"Many things," he answered. "I should have thought before I brought you here to-day,—before I yielded further to the charm and the attraction that you have had for me. But I little dreamed the power of it, or that it would master me as it has done. There is no doubt that I love you, Jenny. The contrast between the man you have seen to-day and the man that I have shown myself to other women all these years would give you proof of that. And, surely, that I love you is not

strange. But you,—you are a very young girl. Do you not think that, years to come, you may feel with despair that I am too old for you ? ”

“ If you can say that,” she answered, with a ring of indignation in her voice, “ I cannot feel that you really love me.”

“ You are wrong there, Jenny,—all wrong. I shall prove to you that I do love you truly and without a doubt, when I am able to speak as my real self. That is impossible now. In a day or two I shall be stronger and calmer, and so will you.”

Jenny gave an odd little laugh.

“ I am strong now,” she said,—“ strong as a lioness, I think. As for being calm, I don’t want to be calm. I’m tired of being calm. The grand, delightful, blessed thing about me now is a feeling of moving, unresting, overflowing joy, which, I trust and pray, will never let me know what it is to be calm again.”

Struan felt once more that sense of rejoicing in the nature of her.

“ You witch ! — you child ! ” he murmured. He honored her for the rashness and self-forgetfulness of her display of feeling as much as another man would have condemned her for it. He was master of himself again, however ; and, by the

time that he had reached the entrance to the park, he had resumed his usual manner.

"We will wait here for a car," he said, in the voice of the music-master and friend.

"A car?" she said, her face falling. "Couldn't we get a cab?"

"I suppose we could, but I think the car is better."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because it is more protected. I must think what is best for you."

"What does it matter? People have seen you with me already."

"And they must see that I am with you in the proper way. It is not usual for young girls to drive about New York at this hour with men to whom they are not related. We must follow the general rule. For the rest," he added, "I am rewarded now for much, if you knew it, Jenny. You have trusted me instinctively, and the fact is precious to me; but, if you had made all possible inquiries, you would have learned from every source that I was a man whom you could safely put confidence in. There is no woman who ever trusted me to her hurt, and no breath of scandal has connected my name with that of any woman. So you may feel sure, Jenny, that you can be seen

with me without damage to your sweet good fame. Now do you understand me when I say that I am so richly rewarded for the restraint that I have put upon my life?"

Jenny made no answer. Even yet he did not comprehend the abandonment of the love so recklessly given and so absolutely unrepented of. She was something of a savage in her nature, and she chafed against even the slight conventionality of going in the street-car instead of in the cab. She had seen a cab go by empty while they were talking, and she had longed to hail it.

When they were in the car a silence fell between them. The mind of each was too intensely preoccupied with recent emotions and experiences for them to be able to talk of ordinary things. Struan could not get a seat, so he stood in front of her and held to a strap, his tall figure lurching occasionally with the motion of the car.

They looked away from each other, each face assuming a mask of indifference; but now and then he would glance down at her or she up at him, as if to verify the thoughts that were passing in their minds. When he saw her absently looking at her lap, or she saw him gazing impassively before him, these recollections seemed so improbable that each of them felt as if they

must have dreamed. Once only, in these furtive glances, their eyes met; and then they knew it was no dream. There was a poignant consciousness in both the man's heart and the woman's which made their pulses throb so fast, their breaths so quicken, that they were warned against another look. Jenny felt her face grow scarlet, and even Struan had a sense of quick relief in looking around and assuring himself that he had been unobserved; for, surely, that surge of emotion which he had felt must have made its impress on his face.

Presently a man got in the car whom Struan recognized, and greeted cordially. They talked together, and laughed occasionally, over things of which Jenny knew nothing. The man was younger than Struan; and he had an air of interest, and even of deference, in talking to him. He had glanced at her once with a look of respectful attention, but after that both of them seemed to forget her. She resented it. She even felt hurt; for it gave her a sense of being, of necessity and forever, apart from the life of this distinguished man. But then would come the memory of recent things, and with an easy effort she would recall the delight of his embrace and kiss; and she felt that he belonged to her, and to her only, and was jealous of every moment's attention that he gave elsewhere.

Presently a woman seated next her got up and went out. When Struan seemed not to notice it, and let some one else take the vacant seat, Jenny felt like crying. How did he divine this feeling, unconscious as she was of having given a hint of it? But so it was that, when they had left the car, and were walking side by side, he said, —

“ I wanted so to take that seat.”

“ Why didn't you ? ”

“ Because of the very fact that I wanted it so much that I was afraid that the man to whom I was talking might see it in my face. I am more careful of you, Jenny, than you will allow yourself to see the use of. And now,” he added, pausing on the corner of the block in which was situated her dreary little boarding-house, “ I am going to take leave of you, Jenny. I won't go all the way to the door. I shall think of you until you come on Wednesday. Good-by, my dear.”

He pressed her hand just one brief second,— which seemed to her fond heart so miserably inadequate a farewell,—and then he left her.

IV

TO Struan the interval of three days before they should meet again was welcome. Jenny felt that this was so, and felt also a restless impatience of such a condition. There was nothing to be gained on her part by the long hours of daylight and darkness, during which she must think of him uninterruptedly and longingly. Her mind was completely made up. She had not one misgiving of her own to conquer, and she longed only for the opportunity to conquer his.

Her parents were dead; and her other relatives seemed, in their distant country home, to touch her life as little as if they had lived on another planet. They had long ago adopted the policy of leaving her to her own devices, and she knew that from them she had nothing to fear. She was happy beyond her utmost dreams of joy. She had the love of the man who was supreme among men in her eyes, and she loved him with all the abandonment of her nature.

At the present moment, however, her impatience hindered her full enjoyment of this consciousness. She was a simple, primitive creature, and knew

nothing of the self-analysis and complicated motives of the *fin de siècle* woman. She was uneducated, in spite of her shrewdness, and absolutely unreligious. She had thought little, except as to what she wanted and what she didn't want. She knew that she wanted, above all things, love that should be intense in kind as well as degree. She found it now just within her reach, and the man that she so ardently loved loved her. She could not possibly understand any scruples which should keep them apart.

To Struan all was different. He spent those days in great distress of mind. That he was in love, passionately in love, with Jenny, he did not attempt to deny; and sometimes, for sweet and agitated hours, as he lay awake during those nights, he indulged himself in happy imaginings of what marriage to that loving, adoring, cheery, wholesome young creature, ardent as himself, would be. The strongest part of Jenny's power over him lay in the fact that she was the absolute opposite of the woman by marrying whom he had wrecked his life. He believed—and years of serious and honest thought had only strengthened the conviction—that the reason for the failure of that marriage lay in the antagonism of temperament between himself and Rachel; and he had not

a doubt that it was she who had been at fault there, and not himself. He knew that she was incapable of comprehending ardent and passionate feeling, and that only he believed to be the right basis of marriage. Then he thought of Jenny. What a contrast! There was the sort of nature that would have been a mate for his! His hideous mistake in that first marriage seemed more glaring than ever.

Then came the sweet, insidious question from within: Why not remedy that mistake, for his future? He was still comparatively young in years; and he knew that, in feeling, he was a youth again,—since this scene with Jenny in the park. Ah, she *could* give him back the wild freshness of morning! What a gift! What a boon! What life and impulse it would put into him, for his work, his career, for everything! Then it seemed almost a duty to take to him this lovely young being, who had so ruthlessly offered herself to him! It would be delight, rejuvenation, bliss.

And why not? Those were the reasons for it; and what were the reasons against it? Faintly and feebly did they utter themselves, in the midst of this tempestuous argument on the other side,—an argument in which passion, romance, instinct, inclination, all pitted themselves against cold rea-

son. For Reason said no, and said it rigidly and persistently. Reason argued that this being who was akin to him in temperament might not be in other things, and Reason declared these other things to be the more important. This, Passion denied. Had it not been proved that feeling was the essential thing in marriage? At least, to him, Struan, it had been so proved. And, besides, who could tell what possibilities of mental and spiritual development there might be in this charming girl who loved him so ardently? True, she had given no indication of any mental or spiritual qualities as yet, and Reason urged that there would have been some such indications; but Feeling scouted the idea, and subdued it with the old fallacious but potent saying, Love is enough!

Besides, when all else was said and done, there was Leonard! And here Reason got her innings; for, at this thought, Passion felt that there was still a leash upon her. This thought, in spite of all the ardor in his blood, gave Struan pause. Yes, there was Leonard; and Leonard had a great ideal of his father. To live up to this ideal was the most powerful inspiration of Struan's life. And why should a marriage with Jenny cause him to fall below it? asked Feeling, arrogantly. And the cold voice of Reason said only: You know,

Then he felt that he did know, deep down in the secret places of his heart; but overlying these was such a seething, boiling flood of feeling, reminding him of the sweet scene past, and prompting him toward a renewal of that sweetness, that Reason's voice was well-nigh drowned.

When morning came, the morning on which he was to see Jenny again, he felt that he had, after some hours of soothing sleep, got himself a little better in hand. Feeling was working still, a mighty force within him; but Reason was steadily advancing, and disputing every foot of ground. On one point only the two were agreed; and that was in drawing the sharp contrast between the ardent, brave, untrammelled temperament of Jenny, and Rachel, with her cold, prudish, repellent nature, so morbidly timid about the criticisms of her little set.

One of the strongest elements in Struan's nature was a rebellion against conventionality. He heartily despised it, and had given strong proof of this scorn by shaking himself free from a long line of conservative and aristocratic ancestors, chiefly lawyers, statesmen, diplomatists, and clergymen, and, obeying the bent of his nature, had embraced the career of a musician. After a few wretched years of married life, spent in the desper-

ate effort to restrict, restrain, and contradict his real nature, he had given it up, made the best arrangements that he could for his wife and child, and gone abroad to continue the study of music,—a field in which he had already won distinction. In his life in foreign cities he had lived principally among Bohemians, making friendships with men and women there which were the most affectionate and enduring ties that he had ever known. Artists, actors, authors, musicians,—he had a warm communion with them all; and no man was ever better loved than these friends loved him. For the men of his own standing in the social world he cared little; and the women, except in rare instances, he despised.

He had an ideal woman, at this period of his life, who did him good service. She was a being equally passionate and delicate, equally cultivated and broad-minded, equally refined and free, equally religious and tolerant. He had believed intensely in this woman, and for years had looked for her, not with any idea of satisfying the promptings of his love, but with a hope, quite as important and far more possible, that he might so see realized his ideal of womanhood. That hope he had at last given up, that ideal he had reluctantly decided to be impossible. The women

whom he met in his professional career were often broad and true and generous in their natures, in keen contrast to his wife; but they presented a strong contrast to his ideal as well in that they lacked the breeding, the sensibility, the cultivation, which belonged to that ideal, and, in addition to all these, the religion.

He knew how easy it would be to laugh at him for this last requirement; for he never entered a church, and he did not know Sunday from any other day except that he was less bound by business engagements. For all that he was deeply religious, and he had an indestructible faith in the fatherhood of God. It belonged to his ideal of the supreme woman that she should have it also.

It was long now since he had had dreams of this ideal. Bohemia had furnished him with no semblance of her, and society had made her seem more impossible still. He scarcely ever thought about her now. She belonged to his mistaken past and to his intangible future which lay beyond this life. Somewhere, in another star, she might be waiting for him.

Another star, however, is an unsatisfactory sphere for an ardent-natured, active-minded man such as Struan; and he scarcely ever reverted consciously to that dream of his earlier years. The battle of

life was waging round him ; and he took his part in it, through a thousand issues of sympathy and help for others, and he got sympathy and help in return.

But from no source whatever did he get what to a man of his nature was the supremely important thing,—the sympathy of woman. He was too experienced a man to play with the delusive idea of Platonic love. He had seen that bubble burst too often. If he loved his neighbor's wife, as in some cases he did, it was as his neighbor's wife ; and that sort of love could not give him the sympathy for which he longed. People supposed him to be superior to the need of the sympathy and companionship of women, but that need had never come home to him with a more compelling insistency than now when he thought of Jenny.

Upon what simple lines was this young girl's nature made ! Her unquestioningness of anything but love seemed to him superb. Nothing was plainer than that her life in her country home had been as free as a child's from the consciousness that made so large an element in the lives of most girls. She had called him her first love, and he had not one doubt that her words were true. How free she was from that air of initiation and experience which the best of the women in Bohemia had ! How splendid had been her resolute refusal

to accept any compromise with love ! How bravely she had made up her mind to wed her art, even when she did not pretend to any high place in her profession ! And, then, how pretty she was ! — how fearless ! — how strong ! The remembrance of her kisses came back to him, keen and poignant, as they had come a hundred times. What a wild creature she was ! and how fearlessly, meeting Love at last, she had put her hand into his, obedient to his every prompting ! The pure, untrodden freshness of her nature, the passion of it, made an appeal both to his senses and his spirit. He longed to accept and rejoice in the love that she was so willing to give ; and he knew that he had both the perception and the power — rare perhaps — to protect her impulsive self-abandonment. This in itself seemed to make a strong demand upon him.

Struan's life had been a sad one all through. He had forbidden himself a thousand times the things that other men, in his case, would have thought themselves entitled to ; but the denial which he must practise now was infinitely the hardest of all.

And need he so deny himself ? Jenny had said that she was his, whether he chose to take her or to leave her. How he longed to take her ! How his heart rebelled at the idea of leaving her ! How

she loved him ! That was the most terrible part of all. She would have to suffer so. And he would have to suffer, too. There was no doubt of that.

But how, if they chose to forego the suffering, and to give themselves up to love ? He was a man of forty-two ; but never, in his most impassioned boyhood, had he felt his blood so quicken, his heart so thrill, to the idea of love as now, when he thought of Jenny.

V

THAT Wednesday morning Struan got up early, and dressed quickly, with the consciousness of a strengthening will and purpose. He had been miserably at fault in that last scene with Jenny. He should never have let her know of his feeling for her. At the first evidence that she gave of her feeling for him he should have cut things short. All he could do now was to right himself as far as possible, and so put into their future intercourse a quality of deliberation and judgment which had certainly been lacking thus far. He must have a plain talk and understanding with her, for her sake and his own.

The hour for the lesson came. They met quietly, even coolly. Struan, in accordance with a resolution made beforehand, went to the piano and pulled out the stool, seating himself, ready to begin.

Jenny saw and understood his action. There was a certain air of defiance about her as she took her stand at his side, and, when he struck the proper note, began to sing. Her voice was clear

and steady, and for a time her pride supported her. When the lesson was about half through, however, she felt a dangerous weakness coming over her. She had looked as long as her self-command would permit at that familiar profile. She had learned to know that its present expression, with the lower lip slightly protruding beyond the upper, meant strong feeling under strong command. She was sure that he had thought out the situation between them, and that he had decided it in a manner unfavorable to her wishes. How could she go on singing that inane thing supposed to be a passionate love-song, but in reality a mush of sentimentality compared to the fire in her breast?

Her voice faltered. She threw down her sheet of music, and said abruptly :

“What nonsense to keep up this farce !”

“What farce ?” he said, facing her.

“The farce of our acting as if nothing had happened. It may be possible to you. It is not so to me. You are cruel.”

She sank into a chair, and turned away from him, leaning her elbow on a table and resting her chin in her hand. He fixed his eyes upon her, taking in all the dejectedness of her figure and her attitude. Then he said :

“The pain that it gives me to hear you call me

cruel I must take as a warning. If I deserve it now in a slight degree, I must be warned in time, and not give you reason to apply that word to me in a sterner sense."

"What do you mean?" she said, turning and facing him. "Please say exactly what you mean."

"I mean," he said gravely, "that I owe you reparation already. I should not have shown you that I loved you. I should not have taken advantage of your generosity —"

"Wait a moment," she interrupted. "Let us be perfectly honest. You took no advantage. I showed no generosity. It was I, first, who gave expression to my love for you; and do you think I am ashamed of it? You don't know me! Where other women — women whom I do not comprehend — would feel shame, I feel only exultation. And why should I not exult? The man I love loves me — for that you do love me you cannot make me doubt."

"I don't wish you to doubt it. I have never thought of denying it," he said, warming unconsciously under the spell of her fiery truthfulness. She *was* fine in her splendid candor. It *was* unlike other women, and supremely unlike one woman.

"Then, if you love me, what else can matter? Why should we not be happy in our love for one another?"

"Ah, Jenny, that is just what I have been asking myself. And there seem to me strong reasons,—things that should be considered, at least."

"What reasons?"

"For one thing, I am too old for you."

She laughed, throwing her head back sideways. Then, after the emission of that mocking laugh, she looked at him gravely, her lips curling in a scorn from which all mirth had departed. It seemed to say,—that look,—“I am ashamed of you.” And Struan felt ashamed of himself.

"The question of age I admit to be a minor matter, when other things are right," he said.

"Well, I should think so!" answered Jenny. "I did not expect it of you, Mr. Struan,—to be giving conventional reasons."

"‘Mr. Struan,’" he repeated, smiling as if the formality of the term amused him.

She returned his smile, the same incongruity having struck her. This mutual consciousness alarmed him a little. It was significant of too much. After a moment's silence Jenny went on, as if impatient:

"Well, what else?" she said. "We have disposed of the question of age."

Struan felt it rather difficult to go on. Somehow, in this resolute young presence, in face of her beauty, her courage, her charm, the reasons which he had thought potent seemed to lose much of their force.

"Do you know," he said next, "how short a time I have been free from the bond of my first marriage? You should know that."

"Why?" said Jenny. "I don't see that it is at all important. I know nothing, and I shall not ask."

"It has been scarcely more than a year," he said, "since death put an end to that bond,—an obligation to which I can feel that I was faithful to the best of my ability."

"Feeling that, you need concern yourself with it no further," she said. "The fact that you are free is enough. Indeed, if you were not so,—if you were held by any tie but that of love,—I should not regard it."

"Stop, Jenny," he said, divided between admiration for her courage of love and fear that she might err too far on the other side. "Don't say that."

Jenny laughed.

"Well, I won't say it," she answered; "but I have no timidity in my love. Go on now, and

tell me your other reasons. If they are no better than these —”

Somehow they seemed to be dwindling, both in number and importance; but Jenny was waiting impatiently for him to speak. So he said:

“I do love you, Jenny, so truly, so greatly, that I confess that I am tempted to disregard all else. I must not yield to the temptation, however. I must stop and think. For one thing, there is my duty to my son.”

“And how does that affect the matter?” she said. “Would you wish his duty to you to come before his duty to the woman he loved? Would you?”

The question impressed him.

“I should not,” he said emphatically. “I have always told him that that was a man’s highest allegiance.”

“I should think so,” she said with conviction; and he could detect an inflection of resentment or mortification in her voice.

“Jenny,” he said tenderly, “I am obliged to appear to you now what I am not. Forgive me. You do not understand. Perhaps you think my feelings are not deeply involved, as yours are. Perhaps you think I should not suffer if I gave you up. If you think that —”

But he paused, overcome by the sorrow of her face. The tears had sprung to her eyes, and her mouth was quivering.

“You do not think how I would suffer,” she said. “You care only to do your duty to others, and you think nothing of your duty to me. You can do as you please, but on one point you shall not be mistaken: if you part from me now, you will ruin my life. I would not say this if I did not know you loved me. I would not let myself feel it, even. But, knowing that you do love me, if you send me away from you, it will be death to me, or worse. I don’t know what will become of me, and I don’t care. My life will just be ruined. Ever to hope again would seem to me absolute folly. I worshipped you for years before you ever saw or heard of me. You have been my one supreme ideal. When a young girl has cherished such an ideal through the years, and, meeting him at last in the flesh, has found him more than her dreams had pictured, has then been held in his arms, kissed by him, told that she was loved by him, and then,” she added, her eyes blazing between love and indignation, “coolly recommended to give him up for certain flimsy conventions which she despises, and which he ought to despise as much as she —”

She rose to her feet, and made a motion toward the door. But Struan had sprung up, too, and placed himself between it and her.

"You shall not leave me like this," he said. "What you say of me is not true. I have the courage of my love as well as you."

"Your love!" she said in a light mocking voice. "What is your love?"

He reached forward and seized her hands in both of his, and held them so pressed tight.

"Jenny," he said, "you absolutely madden me when you speak like that. Don't pretend that you doubt my love for you. That is a thing I will not stand. Look at me."

But Jenny's eyes were hid behind their lowered lids. She did not lift them, and he said again,

"Look at me."

That voice she knew not how to disobey. She looked up and met the dominating gaze of which she was the slave. Her hands shook in his. Two teardrops filled and overflowed her eyes.

Then in the same all-conquering voice, sunk to the lowest whisper, he said:

"Now do you believe I love you? Answer me."

"Yes," she said, "you love me—in your way."

The answer stung him. He dropped her hands, and drew apart from her. She seemed to accept the separation thus implied; and, turning toward the piano, she began to put up her music in its case.

"I can say no more," she said. "You know how I feel; and I, I am afraid, know also how you feel. We need talk no more about it, if other things weigh with you more than love. It is not so with me. Perhaps you despise me for it. If so, I can't help it. I am made that way, and so I am."

"Despise you for it, Jenny! I love it, I delight in it. It is what I admire, in a woman as well as a man. You do not understand me."

She saw that he was moved,—that the thought of parting from her had told upon him.

She went on tying up her music. Then she said:

"Yes, I think I understand you. You have made it very plain. We needn't talk about it any more. This will be my last lesson, and I shall not see you again. I will send you, by mail, the money that I owe you for teaching me."

As she turned as if to go, he took her arm in a firm grasp.

"You will take your seat in that chair," he

said, pressing her into it, "and listen to what I have to say. For you to talk of paying me money is not only absurd, it is a positive unkindness."

"Why?" she said innocently. She had remained in her seat, pleased within her at his masterfulness. Up to this time she had dominated every man she had come in contact with. "Why is it either absurd or unkind?" she went on. "You are only my music-teacher, and I am only your pupil who owes you money. If you agree to it, I will deduct for the lessons I have not taken and shall not take. The money, I suppose, is of more importance to you than it is to me, as I have no one to look to for anything and am very poor."

She said this with deliberate purpose, and she saw that it told.

"Jenny," he said, with that peculiar kindness of look and tone which she had seen nothing like in man or woman before, "if you meant to cut me to the heart by that, you have succeeded. The thought of your loneliness undoes me. You must give me a little more time to think this matter over, both in its bearing upon your life and mine. But this I will tell you, Jenny, that your need of me can hardly be greater than mine of you. Other men may live their lives and do their work without love, but not I. You accuse me of hold-

ing it a secondary thing, but you are wrong. All my life I have attached the first importance to it,—too much, I fear. Always in my heart I have been a seeker after love,—not, I must explain, as an end, but as the means to any great end in my life. It may not be so with others, but I know it is so with me. I can never do my best work or render material service to my generation without the help and support of a woman's love, a home, a domestic life. All these years that I have lived so far, I have felt myself hampered by this lack. I ought to be superior to it, I suppose; but it is my limitation. I love you, my Jenny. Never dream but that I love you; but I must be alone now to think,—away from the spell of your sweet presence. We must part now, but we must see each other again for our final word. Come as usual for your next lesson, and then we will settle it how our future is to be.”

He got up, and, standing in front of her, lifted her two little hands in his big ones, and placed them at each side of his face. They were soft and dimpled as a child's, and their palms were like satin; but no less sweet to her was the touch of his dark skin, now smooth, now harsh, as he moved her unresisting hands up and down his shaven cheeks.

Jenny's eyes grew big with tears.

"O Struan," she said, calling him by the name he had lived by in her heart, "I worship you."

He gently shook the head between her palms.

"Love me, help me," he said: "don't worship me. I am a weak and joy-loving man, who cannot even yet be sure of himself, in spite of much discipline. My resolution now is to discover the right and do it, at any cost to myself. It is the possible cost to you — you generous, sweet, magnificent young thing — that makes the pang. I am old compared to you, and I must give you the benefit of my hard-won experience. I will try to do the best I can for both of us, my Jenny; but now I feel weak and bewildered."

He had taken her hands down from his cheeks, and now he framed her flushed face with his own.

Jenny lifted one pretty shoulder, and bent her head sideways toward it, so that she might press the dear hand close. Then she reached up, and with her two caressing little hands she drew his dark face nearer.

"Will you kiss me good-by?"

"No, Jenny," he said, shaking his head, and smiling down at her. "I have confessed that I am weak, but I am not weak enough for that."

He gently drew away from her, as he said these words; and she felt that the interview was ended.

She went to get her gloves; and, as she put them on, standing a few feet away from him, she said: "I only ask you to remember this, in making your decision. If you decide as I wish, you will be securing not only my happiness, but my good forever. Should you decide the other way, you will spoil not only my chance of happiness, but you will risk the welfare of my soul and body to an extent that you may not dream of, but which is known to me absolutely. You will think of that, until we meet again. The time will seem long to me, but I shall sweeten it with thoughts of you and of what our love and life may be, if you will let the happiness that waits come in."

The words called up the picture to his mind. A swift thought came over him that, if he decided they must part, he could hardly dare to see her again. The spell of her bodily presence was too sweet.

Some occult influence must have carried the thought from his mind to hers.

"If I should never see you again!" she cried, as if in terror.

He could not speak. He stood and looked at

her in a way that was a recognition of that possibility.

"O Struan, I cannot bear it! It is too much!" she cried; and, with a sudden burst of tears, she threw herself into his arms, and clasped her arms around his neck.

To the winds with his resolutions! They were forgotten in one heart-beat, as he clasped her close and covered her face with kisses. As quickly were her tears forgotten then. They stopped short at their source, as she clung to him, returning his caresses with an ardor equal to his own.

Out of that trance of joy she came back to the consciousness of apprehension.

"Swear to me, Struan," she said, "that you will see me once again. I will not go until you promise it."

"I promise," he said. "Go now, Jenny. We will meet again."

And Jenny went, exulting in hope for the future as she exulted in fruition in the past.

VI

JENNY laughed to herself as she reflected upon the peculiar positions which she and Struan had held during their last interview. It was she who had wooed and pleaded, and he who had hesitated and held back. To a woman of her temperament, this idea was piquant and unusual, not in the least mortifying.

It was Jenny's habit to scan the papers every morning in search of some mention of Struan's name. Two mornings after her interview with him, she saw a concert advertised, at which Struan was to lead the orchestra. It was to take place at the great music hall where he had tested her voice. She had never seen him lead, and she decided to go. Accordingly, she went out and bought her ticket,—a single seat which happened to be left in an advantageous place, well in view of the stage. There was no friend whom she could call on to go with her; and, if there had been, there was no companionship that she would have wished now. She was entirely fearless of possible annoyances, such as might have hampered other girls, as she dressed herself with great care, and took a street-car for the music hall.

The great room was brilliantly lighted and tolerably well filled when she entered it. What a contrast to the empty gloom which had pervaded it when she saw it last! Entered from the wide corridors, blazing with lights and animated with movement and sound, she could scarcely believe it the same place.

But there, at one side of the stage, was the little door by which she and Struan had entered; and there, too, was the *daïs* for the leader of the orchestra to stand on, the corner of which, where she had sat, he had promised always to associate with her in the future. Would he think of that to-night, she wondered? Her heart sank. At that moment it seemed ridiculously unlikely.

The piano had been taken away, and the music-stands and seats for the orchestra were in place. The hall was getting fuller every moment, and presently the seats next to Jenny were taken possession of by a fashionable-looking party. As they sat down, Jenny heard a very smartly dressed young girl say:

"I'm so glad we're in good time. I wouldn't miss seeing Struan come out for anything."

"O *you!*" replied her friend. "I believe that's all you come for,—to see Struan. I don't believe you'd know it if the orchestra played on

dumb instruments, so long as Struan stood up there and sawed the air and waved his arms and nodded."

The first speaker laughed good-humoredly.

"Well, you used to be as bad," she said; "and the only difference is that you've learned concealment, which I haven't, and don't want to. You're engaged to a prig who has cut you down on enthusiasms."

They both laughed, and then grew suddenly quiet as the members of the orchestra began to come out at the rear of the stage and take their places.

Jenny turned, and looked around her. The tiers of boxes were filled now with a magnificent audience. The rich colors of their costumes and the wavings of their fans made a blur of tone and motion that bewildered her. She seemed a lonely atom in this gay and social place.

A sharp root of bitterness shot up within her; and an act which she had committed a little while ago seemed to her useless, foolish, and even humiliating.

The act was this. Before starting for the concert, she had written on a bit of paper the words "I am here," and had signed it with the initial of her first name and sealed it in an envelope, which she directed to Struan.

On her arrival at the hall she had handed this envelope to one of the ushers in a business-like way, saying that it was important that it should reach Mr. Struan before the concert began.

It made her cheeks hot now to think of the importance which she had assumed that Struan would attach to the announcement on that bit of paper. How could it be anything to him whether she was there or not? She began to feel that all his arguments against marrying her were got up to spare her feelings. He would naturally be too kind to tell her plainly how unequal and absurd a marriage would be between a great and important man like him and an insignificant little nobody like her. Poor Jenny! She was feeling most unhappy as the last members of the orchestra took their places.

Then there followed an unmistakable hush over all the house. The people next to Jenny sat still and expectant, gazing at the stage where each one of the musicians now waited in his place.

Now at the little door at the side Struan's powerful figure appeared, and walked rather quickly across the wide stage to the leader's stand.

The house burst into loud applause. He had taken his place with his back to the audience; and he turned, and bowed gravely.

Poor little Jenny! She knew only a conscious-

ness of love,—overwhelming, passionate, all-dominating, and at the same time keenly sad. She felt her love for this man a stronger force within her than it had ever been yet, but that he could care for her seemed a wild improbability which she wondered she could ever have been deluded by.

Good looks go far with women, and she had never seen Struan look so well. His careful evening toilet gave to both his face and figure an air that made him look elegant and distinguished. He bore the ordeal of his present conspicuousness superbly; and as twice he raised his arm to begin, and was stopped by the applause of the audience, and turned once, and then again, to respond by that grave bow, Jenny's heart was crowded to the point of pain with love, adoration, and longing.

In response to his third and very decided motion to begin, the orchestra started smoothly off.

The concert opened with the ever-popular "Last Waltz" of Weber. Jenny listened entranced. She had never heard a really fine orchestra; and never had her senses been so strung to the key of appreciation of the wistful, alluring, passionate, melancholy power of sound as they were to-night. As all those human-throated violins before her, in

long lines, gave out, like one voice, the sound of those keenly sweet staccato notes, while the bow-arms of the players moved as one, and the audience remained one vast hush, and Struan stood there, chief among that great assembly, his body erect and still, while his right arm gently beat the time to that delicious melody, it seemed to Jenny, who had lost sight of orchestra and audience alike, that that voice of music was created by his touch upon the air, and that it spoke to her alone. She felt that she would die to have some sign from him.

Then remembrance came back; and the hopelessness of such a possibility made her so wretched that she began to feel that she could not stand it, and must go away.

When the waltz was finished, the loud applause was all the more noticeable for the calm that had gone before. As it was subsiding, Jenny heard the girl beside her say :

“Do look at Struan. How still he stands! He wants the orchestra to have the whole glory of that applause. Good gracious! Some innocent is sending him flowers. I’m glad of it. It makes him so cross, and I love to see him frown.”

But any who expected him to frown were disappointed. As the flowers, a great bundle of red

roses, with long dark green stems and leaves, were handed up to him, he reached for them with a smile. Then, after bowing quickly, he took them, with a manner of great directness, and laid them gently, almost lingeringly, on a certain corner of the *daïs*. This done, he glanced toward the audience, a brief, bright smile touching his face, and a look so concentrated in his eyes that it pierced almost painfully to one heart.

“What on earth has come over him?” Jenny heard her neighbor say at the same moment that Struan turned his back and gave the signal to begin the next selection.

All the blood in Jenny’s body had seemed to change its course, and flow backward to her heart, of late so miserable, now so passionately glad. She knew that it had been a signal to her; and it was as potent and as fully comprehended as if over the heads of all those people between her and the stage there flaunted a banner bearing the sweet word “Joy.”

It was that note which rang out above the thousand others coming from the orchestra now, and Jenny sat as in a trance of bliss.

She hardly knew what happened after that. She was as quiet as a mouse in her place among all those unknowing people, who sat with friends

about them and talked animatedly between the selections. She had no one to speak to, but she no longer felt alone. The sense of a glorious, wonderful companionship which possessed her made them seem the lonely ones.

At the end of the concert she saw Struan cast around the house a penetrating, rapid glance, which made her heart beat to suffocation as it passed over her. She knew, however, that she could be no more distinguishable from where she stood, than one of the bees in a swarming hive.

She saw him take up the flowers after that keen look, and walk rapidly across the stage, and disappear.

Moving slowly from her place with the great mass of people who crowded the aisle, Jenny walked silently along, absorbed in joyful thoughts, and unconscious of everything and every person outside her, until in the lobby she caught a glimpse of an object that made her heart give a sudden leap.

There, near the entrance door, stood Struan, his overcoat on his arm, his hat in his hand. A little flutter agitated the people about her as they saw him. Those who knew him craned their necks to try to catch his eye, and get a bow from him. Those who did not know him gazed respectfully at those who did.

He seemed to see none of them. With his brows contracted and his eyelids slightly drawn together, he was scanning the crowd that poured out of the concert-room, as if in search of something. Presently his gaze fell upon Jenny, and rested there. She was some distance off; and the crowd moved slowly, so that he had to wait.

As he stood so, some friends came by, and spoke to him. There were both men and women in the party; and he shook hands in his cordial way, and replied to their greetings with his heart-warming smile.

As Jenny came along, he drew away from their detaining hand-grasps, and, walking directly up to her, said in his simple way :

“ Here you are, at last ! I was afraid I should never find you in this crowd.”

He offered his arm; and Jenny took it, conscious that she was being looked at with sudden interest by the people all around, and proud to her soul in the consciousness.

He spoke to her now and then as they passed down the steps and out to the pavement; but he did not look at her, and they were only conventional and unimportant words that he said. He stood looking for his carriage, scanning the vehicles about him with keen eyes under knitted brows.

Jenny glanced up at him now and then, but the sight of his face so near her made her heart throb in such a way that she forced herself to look in another direction. Once he said, speaking lowly, as they seemed for a moment to be isolated in that great crowd :

“It’s all right, Jenny. Don’t be unhappy any more, Jenny. I have something good to tell you by and by.”

But, even as he uttered these words, his frown did not relax, and his eyes were roving over the carriages in front of him, as if his search absorbed him entirely.

At last they were seated side by side. He felt for her hand, and held it close, though he turned his face toward the window ; and presently he produced from under the folds of his top-coat the great bunch of red roses that gave out a sweet, half-wilted perfume from their drooped and heavy heads.

“Here are your flowers, Jenny,” he said. “Did you see what I did with them, and did you understand ? ”

The long strain of joy had been too much for Jenny. She began to tremble violently, while she spoke in sobbing gasps.

“O my love — my master — my king — my darling !” she said brokenly ; and, throwing her-

self back in the corner of the carriage, she burst into passionate tears.

"Why, Jenny, what is this?" he said, not venturing to move closer to her, but pressing her hand in a tightened grasp. "You mustn't cry, my darling. Everything has come right, just as you wanted it. Don't you understand why I did not hesitate to claim you and bring you off in sight of all that crowd? My mind is made up forever. You are to be my wife. Don't cry, my Jenny. You make me wild. I cannot take you in my arms and comfort you, with these accursed lights blazing upon us at every step of the way. But comfort you I will, for every sorrow you have ever known and every one that shall touch your life in the years to come. I can make you happy, my little loved one; and I will. If I were not sure I could do this, I'd let you go; but I do know that I can give you such joy as you have never dreamed. The time is near, my Jenny, when we shall be man and wife."

As he spoke, he got his arm around her, though he came no nearer, and his face was still turned from her.

The agitation of her heart, told so plainly by the trembling of her little childish body, moved him deeply, as the touch of his strong arm moved

her. She had no share in his scruples and self-restraint. Moved only by the ardor of her love, she threw herself upon his breast, and clung to him with both arms around his neck.

He could not cast her off, and for an instant he yielded to her ardent embrace. But he did not lose his consciousness of external things; and, while she still clung to him and tried to draw him close, he disengaged her arms, and managed to put her back in her corner of the carriage.

Jenny, for her part, felt aggrieved and even irritated.

"Oh, what does it matter?" she said. "Suppose the whole world sees us! I want your arms around me, and your kisses, and your love. I have been without you for so long."

"And I, too, without you, my Jenny," he answered with a fervor as great as her own; "but that loneliness is past for both of us. We have not long to wait for each other now. Ah! Jenny, if it is so that I am the bringer of joy to you, judge what you are to me. If only I can make you happy!"

This to him was the essential point. He did not realize that it was so to her, also. Of course, she wanted him to be happy; but the craving of her nature was for personal present joy, and she chafed at the delay.

“You cannot dream, I could not describe to you,” Struan went on, “the hideous disappointment of my first marriage,—the years of my young life that were spent in a bewildered effort to crush out my natural and God-given feelings, and render myself the bloodless, crippled creature that I foolishly thought for a while that I ought to make it my object to be! If you could conceive of the hard endurance of the years of that marriage and the intolerable loneliness that came after it, you would realize how much you are to me, how I am half blinded by the joy that has come to me through you. To be loved as you will love me, Jenny, with such pure passion, such surrender of self, such generous affection and friendship as I shall find in you, is to realize on earth a dream that I had put aside to have fulfilled in some far distant star, which should be my heaven. The heaven of the orthodox would never do for me,” he said in a voice that sounded of his smile, “until I had lived once and tasted once the joy of human love, as God has ordered it for men and women. The spiritual joys of heaven may be better, but they cannot be the same; and I want the other first. The pure delight of giving help one to the other could never be in a world where help was not needed. The

rapture of sympathy exchanged between married friends and comrades could not be in a world without human nature and without sorrow. The supreme delight of love's sufficiency to compensate for every lack could not exist where there were no lacks, and so no room for compensation. Ah! Jenny, if I have ever rebelled at my lot, it has been only at missing the supreme happiness of human love. I had thought that I was to renounce it forever; and now I seem to feel the gentle reproach of the term, 'ye of little faith.' "

Jenny made no answer; and he somehow got the impression that she was preoccupied, and perhaps had not followed him closely. This was true. She was all-absorbed in the thought that they were nearing home, and that there was a great hunger unappeased within her breast. She had, in this strange way, become engaged to Struan; and her passionate heart was oppressed by its need to seal the compact with the kiss of love. With her usual candor, she said, as the carriage was stopping:

"Oh, I did want you to give me one kiss."

"And so did I want that kiss, my Jenny," he said; "but never mind. Come for your lesson at the usual time to-morrow, and I shall have something new and wonderful to teach you,"

VII

STRUAN had asked for three days' time and consideration to make up his mind as to the future of Jenny and himself; but he had reached his decision in a moment. Indeed, before the sound of Jenny's footsteps had died away when she had left his office after her last lesson, his decision had been taken. He had determined to marry her.

The reasons for this decision were twofold. First was his thought of her. He realized that what she said was true,—that she loved him inevitably, and with a passion which, if thwarted, might wreck her life. Whether he had been to blame or not for having roused this feeling in her, there the feeling was; and it had now become his responsibility. Men are more apt than women to marry for this unselfish reason,—to secure the happiness of the other rather than of themselves; and Struan now felt it an obligation to marry Jenny for her own sake. This being so, the secondary element which entered into the case, a selfish element, was the more readily entertained.

This consisted of his love for Jenny, a feeling

as undeniable as hers for him. When once he had come to look upon this marriage as his duty to her, the delight of it to himself almost overwhelmed him. The contrast of this young girl's ardent, wild, untrammelled nature with the cold, repellent, forbidding temperament of Rachel was poignant enough. He would make her happy, please God! He would reward her for her blind, unquestioning trust in him.

He did not reflect that his trust in her was just as blind, that he knew little of her in reality. He felt only, in the first place, that he ought to and could make her happy, and, in the second, that he would be made happy himself by marriage with such a sweet young being, who so passionately loved him.

So he had not a vestige of doubt after Jenny left him that Wednesday morning. He felt that duty, as well as inclination, urged him to give himself to this young girl, who had so generously and unstintedly given herself to him.

It was because of these two reasons that Jenny triumphed. Duty, apart from inclination, would not have sufficed. Neither would inclination apart from duty. But both together were absolute, and there was no hesitancy left in his mind. He would force himself, however, to wait the three

days out. He knew the danger of precipitancy in such matters, and the very strength of his decision made him determine to be deliberate and to allow this interval agreed upon to go by without another meeting. Deep, deep within his secret heart there remained yet a misgiving; but it was too faint in itself, too crowded down by the emotions of delight to which he had now abandoned himself, to count for very much. And, since his mind was made up, since happiness was so near, he felt willing and able to make this concession to reason, and to wait patiently for the appointed time.

So, when he got her note at the concert that evening, he gave himself up unrestrainedly to the consciousness of joy which her presence gave him; and the music of his splendid orchestra made a divine accompaniment to it. It was an hour of almost supreme pleasure to him. Indeed, it would have been without a cloud but for the thought of Leonard.

He would have liked to tell Leonard before taking such a serious step; but he knew the boy's ardent belief and trust in him, and that that feeling would make everything right.

So, after long years of sorrow and denial, joy had come to him at last. And he, even he, Lucien Struan, was to be a loved and loving hus-

band, according to the measure of the stature of a man. Life had been incomplete to him before; but consummation, sufficiency, satisfaction, had come at last.

When Jenny went as usual next morning to the place where for so long she had taken her semi-weekly singing-lesson, it was very wonderful to feel the difference in her own consciousness and to contrast it with the unbroken sameness of both the animate and inanimate objects about her. The stolid office-boy looked at her as indifferently as ever. It seemed incomprehensible that no one saw the marvellous change, which, though hidden within her breast, seemed to Jenny as though written in large characters and pinned upon her sleeve.

When she passed through the little passage that led to the lesson-room, her heart beat so violently that she could plainly hear its thick, hard thumping. She opened the door. There was a large screen before it, cutting off the view of the room; and here she stopped for a moment to get a much-needed calm. As she stood so, she felt as really the presence behind that screen as if her hand had touched him.

The silence on both sides of the screen was intense as she came forth into the room.

There he was, standing erect and waiting, the radiance of satisfied love glowing on his face, his arms outstretched to receive her.

Without hesitation she went to them, and felt herself enfolded in an infinite sweetness.

Afterward, when they were seated together on the sofa, they spoke practically of the plans for their marriage. He wished it to be as soon as possible, he said, and asked when, at the earliest, she could be ready. Would it be possible in a week, he inquired, with some hesitation.

"It would be perfectly possible, as far as I'm concerned, in an hour," Jenny said, "or whatever time it would take us to get to a magistrate's office."

Struan's brows contracted. The serene joy of his face was shadowed by a sudden cloud. There was nothing in the least shocking to him in this girl's absolute freedom from a modesty that he would have called false. Indeed, he saw this with a certain sense of exultation after the opposite experience of his early life. What had disconcerted him now was the suggestion which she had made about the marriage ceremony.

"A magistrate!" he said. "Oh, no, Jenny. I do not often go into a church, but I feel that I must be married to you in a different sort of

place to a business office. You are so young and so trustful that there seems to me to be a very sacred demand on me in this marriage. I want to feel, in every possible way, that I call down the blessing of God upon it; and I want to put a ring on your finger as the sign of an eternal union, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Whatever that form may mean, — whether or not there exists the mystery of the Trinity, — those words are sacred to me from my childhood; and I could never consent to dispense with a religious ceremony between you and me.”

“You must do just as you choose,” said Jenny. “The love between us is the only necessity that I see, and the ring put on my finger with the declaration of that love would be the only ceremony I should find essential.”

Struan’s brow remained clouded as he listened to these words. To wipe the cloud away, she kissed it. He had been so long a stranger to such sweet blandishments that a smile of light came over his face.

“Yes, we must be married in a church, and by a religious ceremony,” he said, tenderly stroking her hand. “However, dear,” he added, noticing that Jenny’s attention was wandering (she had been trying to stretch her little finger and thumb

around his big wrist, and was smiling to see how much it lacked), "we needn't bother about details now, as you say you will leave it all to me. I know a little church on the seashore, within the sound of the breakers; and the clergyman is a man I have long known and loved. We will go to him, Jenny mine, and get him to seal the bond which, by the mingling in our hearts of the pure essence of love, has made us already in spirit man and wife."

He said these words so seriously, fixing his eyes on her with a look so intense in its gravity, that Jenny was half bewildered and half frightened.

"It does not seem to make you very happy," she said. "You look as solemn as if you were talking about a funeral instead of a wedding."

"It's the more solemn of the two," he said. "I want you to realize, Jenny, how solemn it is. When you do not, I seem to myself to be taking advantage of your youth. I can't forget that I am twenty-three years older than you, with all the knowledge of those years stored up in me, in an experience which sometimes makes my heart feel aged indeed. I was growing old fast enough, Jenny, when you came into my life like a good fairy, and made me young again,—younger, in some ways, than I ever felt before! I imagine that the stir-

ring of the sap at springtime through the trunk and limbs of a matured and well-grown tree is a stronger current than the force which sends out the tender shoots and leaves on a sapling. I never felt myself more vivid than I feel now. The crude virility of a boy is not to be compared to it. I am young enough for you, Jenny, in all but experience; and it is by the possession of that that I hope to save your dear feet from many snares into which my own have fallen, and out of which they have not been wrenched except with bitter pain."

Again he saw that Jenny's thoughts were wandering. This time it was his hair which occupied her. She laid hold of the somewhat unruly locks that fell about his forehead, and smoothed them into place. Then she ventured to touch the ends of his mustache, and to give them an upward twist away from the curved lines of the mouth.

"I wish I didn't feel a little bit afraid of you," she said. "I am trying my best to make myself not feel so, but you take everything so seriously."

The sternness of his lips relaxed into a radiant smile, showing his white teeth and softening all his features. With an impetuous movement, he caught her in his arms, and, pressing her head down against his breast, drew back a little and looked at her.

"*Now* are you frightened?" he said, kissing her; "and *now* — and *now* — and *now*?"

An ecstasy of delight came to her with these kisses, so blended as they were of playfulness and fervor. Low little ripples of laughter broke from her girlish lips, while her young eyes mocked and challenged him. He pressed her to him till she writhed with pain and laughter. His kisses lingered on her lips ever longer and longer. His face grew grave again, and under the stern influence of those dominating eyes her face also grew graver. The few words of endearment that they uttered were spoken in whispers lower than their breathing.

At last, when stillness had fallen between them, and she rested quiet, with her arms about his neck, he looked deep into her eyes, as if his spirit was trying to touch her spirit as his body was touching her body.

Jenny met his look a little wonderingly.

"What are you thinking of?" she said.

"Tell me first your thoughts. What were you thinking of in that long silence?"

"About my wedding-dress," she answered simply. "Of course, it will have to be a travelling costume, but I was thinking whether it would look best made with a waist or a jacket."

He loosed his arms about her, and put her quietly from him. She could not see his face.

"Now you must tell me your thought," said Jenny, as he stood up.

"Not now, dear. Don't ask me. Often my thoughts are too solemn to be spoken out. I wish I could help you about your dress; but I'm sure it will be all right, whatever you decide. Everything you wear looks pretty."

Jenny's face grew radiant.

"O, you *dear!*" she said, standing up and giving his elbows a shake, while she looked up in his face with a more ardent expression of delight than any words that he had ever spoken to her had called up.

A week later they were married in the little church by the sea. Jenny had decided on the waist, and in it her figure was as smooth and trim as that of a real Jenny Wren. She looked girlishly, beamingly happy.

Struan undoubtedly looked too old for her that day, though at times his face was lighted with a reflection of her young joy. In the main, however, it was serious; and more than once he sighed.

VIII

STRUAN and Jenny had been married a year. Jenny, looking back upon it, acknowledged with her characteristic honesty that it had been a period giving evidence of as affectionate and steadfast a devotion as ever man gave woman. Not once, in spite of the fact that Struan lived in an atmosphere of feminine adoration, had he given cause for one twinge of doubt or jealousy. His care of her, his sensitive protectingness, were almost tiresomely scrupulous; for she was a wild thing, and even the restraints of love were irksome to her at times.

They had gone to housekeeping immediately after their return from their wedding journey, in a pretty house, with garden and grounds, in one of the suburbs of New York. Struan had always avoided society: first, because he did not like it; and, secondly, because he had no time for it. He was a very hard-worked man, and the new experience of a pretty rural home where a loving wife awaited his coming was to him a blissful refuge after a hard day's work; and Jenny made him a good housekeeper and a loving wife.

She lived, in this new existence, in a degree of comfort and ease such as she had never known before. There was no occasion for luxury or splendor; but her husband constantly gave her charming presents, which delighted her.

Struan, who had a host of friends, introduced some of these to Jenny; but, as a rule, she found them dull. Of course, he had a large acquaintance among theatrical people; and it was this set whose society Jenny would have liked. But, except in a few cases, Struan did not desire this society for her; and these exceptions that he made were chosen for the very qualities which, to Jenny, detracted from their desirability. She thought them, both men and women, too grave and thoughtful or too concentrated in their work to be agreeable. Her old taste for light opera revived, and Struan, to gratify her, wearied himself by taking her often; but, when she wanted him to go with her behind the scenes and to introduce her to the various singers and dancers, he declined, always kindly, but decidedly. Then Jenny would pout, and he would sigh and look troubled; and then they would kiss and make friends, and declare that all was right again. And so it would be, until the next disagreement in taste or inclination between them; and, as time went on, these came more frequently.

Sometimes he reproached himself with forgetting how young she was and how she must need congenial companionship; and under this impulse he encouraged her to make friends with the neighbors, a class of people whom he personally found distasteful. Still, if Jenny liked them, and if she found some amusement in them during the long hours in which he was obliged to leave her alone, he forced himself to put up with their narrow point of view and, in many cases, commonness, and tried to persuade himself that it was the natural bond of youth which made them acceptable to Jenny. He saw no serious ground of objection to them; and, if they gave pleasure to Jenny, he resolved to make the best of them. In reality, he saw but little of them; for they, one and all, stood rather in awe of him, and preferred to make their visits to Jenny during his absence in the city.

Two pleasures and resources Jenny had which gave her great satisfaction. One was her music, which she practised assiduously, keeping up regularly her lessons with Struan. The other was dress. She now had the money to indulge her taste for pretty clothes; and she spent a great deal of her time at the dressmaker's, being fitted and deciding on costumes. She had been too long

accustomed to consider the value of money to be wasteful now ; but she allowed herself a good deal of indulgence in the matter of dress, expending much ingenuity in satisfying her taste with as little outlay as possible. This took her to the city shops a good deal, and there she found unlimited amusement. Her neighbors copied her costumes, and took her for their model of fashion and good taste. Struan also noticed and admired her new clothes, though she felt at times a certain qualifiedness in his praise. She did not especially heed this, however, as she considered his taste severe. She was much pleased to see the people on the street—men, women, or children, it mattered little to her—looking at her with pleasure in her charming figure, fresh young face, and pretty clothes. She was quite aware that without the third the two first might have gone unnoticed.

Besides these two sources of interest, Struan took her often to the opera and theatre. Sometimes they went off for a week's jaunt somewhere, for a little change of scene.

Despite the new and unquestionable comfort of having for his wife a loving and broad-minded woman, Struan was at times sadder than he had ever been in his life. He scarcely owned the

fact to himself, and he never made any effort to account for it. He was conscious, for one thing, that he missed his son; but he did not directly attribute this lack to his marriage with Jenny, though, but for that marriage, the intercourse between Leonard and himself would certainly have been freer. He had always looked forward to having Len with him, when he left school. That time was over now, for Len had written that he did not want to give up years of his life to studying a profession, but desired to put into effect now the desire which he had always had,—to become an artist,—and he wished to remain in Paris to study.

This decision, which would once have been a blow to Struan, because it involved a longer separation from his son, came now in the light of a relief. Leonard had taken the marriage to Jenny admirably. The fact that it was the choice and decision of his father was enough for him. He had written to Struan a splendid letter, taking the attitude of man to man rather than that of son to father, and revealing, in spite of delicate loyalty to his mother's memory, a comprehension of the pain and mistakenness of that first marriage which stirred Struan to the profoundest depths of his heart. He did not show this letter to Jenny. It

was sacred between his son and himself; and he felt, somehow, that it would not get its true recognition from her. Leonard had written a letter to Jenny, also,—a perfect letter, so his father thought; but there had been a fineness, a subtlety, in it which had puzzled Jenny a good deal, and made her say quite helplessly:

“Do I have to answer it?”

“Not necessarily,” Struan had said. “I’ll send him a message of thanks for it, if you would prefer that.”

Jenny thought that she would prefer it, decidedly.

And Struan, in spite of himself, felt glad that Jenny decided not to write. The few letters which he had received from her, during his rare absences since their marriage, revealed to him the rather meagre lines of Jenny’s education; and he felt that it would be better for Leonard to see her before he heard from her, when the charm of her grace and beauty would do its part in the impression.

And yet, when he thought of Leonard and Jenny face to face, there was something in the idea that grated on him. She was certainly pretty,—undeniably so; but Leonard was difficult. Young men were apt to be so. Would he not

consider Jenny a little overdressed, a little self-assertive,—a little noisy, even, perhaps, a little —

He would not say the word common. It remained unuttered even in his mind, but the ghost of it floated there.

Leonard had been the darling of Struan's heart. He had had the boy a great deal with him before he had gone off to school, and even then their delightful companionship had been renewed at every vacation; and they had taken charming trips together, and had had talks which Struan remembered as among the most inspiring of his life. The lad's nature was almost a reproduction of his father's,—sensitive, intense, emotional. He had also the same love for the beautiful and admiration for the good. His respect and affection for his father was almost a religion. Whether life would prove him to be possessed of his father's indomitableness of purpose was yet to be seen. He was ardent, impulsive, pleasure-loving, and impatient of restraint. His father had talked to him as frankly about life and its temptations as if he had been of his own age, so that from a child he had had none of the morbid speculations and imaginings which so often sully the minds of the young. In fact, Struan had had a greater sense of companionship with Leonard than with any

other creature ; and now, after a year of marriage with Jenny, he felt the same.

And Jenny herself? At first the supreme joy and glory of being Struan's wife were sufficient for her, and it was without effort that she had told him that she was perfectly happy. Her fiery love for him, which had in it all the romance of girlhood and all the passion of womanhood combined, made it seem enough, for one year, simply to exist for this love. That year had been, as she said, perfectly happy.

It was a necessity to Struan to know this, the more so since, had Jenny been guilty of any such feminine apprehensions as to inquire into his state of mind, he would have been compelled to own to himself, whether he did to her or not, that he could not, with truth, say the same. But Jenny never asked troublesome questions. She took his happiness for granted, seeing that he had what represented to her all its essential conditions. Indeed, so free from analysis, introspection, vague misgivings, and other commonly conceded feminine attributes was Jenny that the part of his nature with which she was able to sympathize least was what might be called the womanly in him. She had none of the little finenesses of feeling which gave delicacy to his strength. There

were a thousand tender places in his consciousness which she trod on unconsciously, a thousand little wants in his heart which she could not possibly fill, because she was unaware of their existence.

Besides this lack in Jenny, there were others which, consciously or unconsciously, Struan was oppressed by. One was the need of his mind for intellect: another was the need of his soul for religion. Jenny had plenty of shrewdness and common sense; but she was as unintellectual as a pretty, sturdy pony. So also she had her own sense of right and duty, but she was as unreligious as a little brown wren. Struan was a bookish man, and kept abreast of the movements of literature and science with earnestness and ardor. He was also essentially a spiritual man; and, though he felt no need of church-going and religious observances, there was no necessity which was so strong in him as the possession of a belief, and the consciousness, not only of the existence, but of the fatherhood of God, and the certainty, without which his present life would have been unreal, of a future life, where intellect should be expanded and love enlarged beyond present imagining.

He was many-sided, and what he craved was sympathy in all. A marriage which failed to

satisfy any of the three necessities of his nature — soul, mind, and body — would necessarily possess for him a bitter incompleteness. His first marriage had had none of the three essential elements. His second marriage had but one. So now, at the end of this year, his heart was almost as hungry as ever; and, in his true and inner self, he was as utterly alone.

All this he knew, though he kept the consciousness of it veiled even in his own mind. He worked harder and harder, put out feelers of sympathy in every direction, befriended at every turn the poor and the lonely, delved passionately at his beloved art, to the end that it might touch more and more widely the manifold issues of life, was every day gentler and kinder to Jenny.

He possessed, however, but one pure and unsullied source of refreshment; and that was in his son.

Leonard's first year of study in Paris was now over, and he was coming home for a visit. So Struan was to have his boy with him for a while before he should settle down to his career in life. It would have been a keen and perfect pleasure for Struan to look forward to — except for Jenny.

One sorrow Struan was spared. Nothing had ever caused him to suspect that there was a secret

consciousness in Jenny's bosom also, through which she had begun to wonder whether she had not made a mistake in this marriage. She had got used to the idea of being Lucien Struan's wife, and the magic had faded from it. He gave her all his spare time, and spent all his unoccupied evenings at home; but, after the first few months of ardent effort to raise her mind to the level of his interests, he had abandoned the task, and now he found it often very difficult to make talk with Jenny. He was conscious, too, of an effort on her side; and, when she sometimes tried to interest herself in the subjects that were so all-important to him, he could see that it was as great a mental strain as it was to him to enter into her interests.

He therefore not only sanctioned, but encouraged, her to make friends with the neighbors; for, with no mental interests, he could imagine how her long days, when he was in the city, must weary her. There was a certain Mrs. Wallis whom Jenny talked of a great deal, and with whom she seemed to spend much of her time. She got such evident pleasure from this intercourse that Struan was disposed to look most kindly upon it, and wished to make Mrs. Wallis's acquaintance.

"Why don't you ask her to come with her husband to dinner some day?" said Struan. He knew nothing whatever of this couple; but he never cared who people were, so long as they were what he liked. Still, he wanted to see them on this latter ground.

"Oh, you wouldn't like them. They are not your sort," Jenny answered, in an off-hand way.

"But, Jenny, I like to believe that your sort and my sort are the same."

"Of course," said Jenny, laughing; "but we like to believe a great deal that we don't believe."

It was her custom to be blunt and honest, and he admired it in her; but, somehow, her candor smote upon him now. It was the first acknowledgment between them of the least disappointment in their intercourse; and, as such, it gave Struan pain.

He saw no sign of any such feeling in Jenny, however; and so he said nothing. Later, though, he made a point of meeting the Wallises; and Jenny was obliged to take him to call.

The visit was made in the evening after dinner; and, as Jenny had notified her friend that they were coming, they found Mr. and Mrs. Wallis waiting to receive them.

Mr. Wallis proved to be a commonplace

business man, inoffensively vulgar, but with the saving grace of unpretentiousness.

Mrs. Wallis was a shock. Feeling very much in awe of Struan, as she had never met so distinguished a man before, and had long known him as a distant star in the great world's horizon, Mrs. Wallis had thought it proper to do honor to the occasion by making a grand toilet. While she felt inwardly flattered and fluttered at receiving a visit from the great Struan, she was one of that large class of vulgar people who, acting according to the motto, "I think myself as good as anybody," covered her inherent though unacknowledged inferiority under a manner of self-assertive confidence.

When Struan was introduced, and shook hands in his cordial way, Mrs. Wallis responded :

"I'm reel glad to see you. I've been reel anxious to meet you. Let me make you 'quainted with my husband."

The kindness of Struan's outward manner did not change, but the heart within him was sick. Was this Jenny's chosen friend, the spirit she had found congenial,—this overdressed woman, with her low-cut gown and befrizzled hair, reeking with the scent of heavy extracts, and gasping out her words with a fluttered manner that seemed

to cast an atmosphere of excitement over the entire room?

This excitement manifested itself in Mr. Wallis by a wild throwing about of his watch-chain, half a yard of which, adorned with heavy seals and locketts, swung from side to side of his rotund body, and which he ceaselessly jiggled and tossed, while he stood wordless in the shadow of his wife's magnificence.

And she did cast a shadow, huge and distinct; for a bunch of electric lights behind her, swelling bulbously out of many-hued shades made in the shape of flowers, lighted glaringly this hideous room which exemplified the ornateness of its mistress's taste as much as did her costume.

Jenny herself seemed subdued in this presence, and seemed to have nothing to say; but, in the silence of her companions, Mrs. Wallis saw her opportunity.

"I've been telling Jenny," she rattled on (this familiarity gave Struan another shock), "that seem-like we ought to know one another, you and me and Syd, when she and me were such chums. We have certainly enjoyed having some congenial people for neighbors. The society here is dreadfully mixed, and we only visit a few families. Now, if you and Syd just like each other as well as Jenny and me, it'll be great."

Surely, even she must have had some sense of incongruity as she looked from one man to the other, where Struan sat a perfect exemplification of the repose of power, while opposite him sat Mr. Wallis, who, at this direct calling attention to him, began once more to toss his watch-chain recklessly, and, in lieu of speech, smiled in an aimless way.

But Mrs. Wallis's motto was, "Make much of yourself, if you'd have others make much of you"; and she fortified herself with the inward reflection that she didn't see why her husband wasn't as good as any other woman's. And so, indeed, she didn't.

Struan made some politely evasive answer, and, in disgust of this woman, opened a conversation with her husband. He was the most tolerant of men,—Struan; and there was no form of vulgarity even which he could not look upon with lenience. It was not Mrs. Wallis's vulgarity now that disturbed him. It was the fact that the woman whom he had chosen for his wife had chosen this woman for her friend.

For Struan, in his heart, had never given a moment's harboring to the suggestion that, in the matter of his marriage, he had been the chosen rather than the chooser. He would never lay the

blame for this marriage on any one but himself, if blame there should be.

Suppose Jenny had made the advances, and run after him. He had his wits about him, his sense of right, his long experience of life. He might have withdrawn at the proper point. That he did not do so must, whatever came, throw the responsibility of the marriage where it rightly belonged,—on him.

He sat now making talk with Mr. Wallis, and adroitly lowering himself to the man's level. They had got on politics; and here Struan had ideas of his own,—ideas colored with his own passionate nature and indomitable optimism. He therefore found an easy ground for discussion with a man who had but one single notion as to the whole situation,—that everything was going to the dogs double-quick.

Even to the men who understood him, Struan's ideas were apt to seem Utopian; but he was ardently loved by his friends, and they loved his theories for his sake. To this man, however, equally devoid of sympathy and of imagination, he was evidently so great a puzzle that, for all Struan's easy and amiable manner, the talk grew decidedly strained.

So Mrs. Wallis, who had been laughing and

talking with a noisy familiarity to Jenny, saw now her chance to attract Struan's attention to herself. She had not got up all this gorgeousness for nothing.

"Oh, do you two stop your everlasting politics!" she said coyly. "We are lots more interesting, ain't we, Jenny? I wish there was no such thing as politics in the world. I don't see the use of it, anyway. I'm coming to talk to Mr. Struan, and let Syd flirt with Jenny for a while. I can see he's just dying to, but he's that bashful — Go on, Syd," she said, giving him a little push, at which, with rather a frightened air, he went over to the seat next Jenny, while his wife took his place by Struan.

"It's the truth," she said in a confidential whisper, putting up her heavily scented fan of white feathers and speaking behind it. "He's the bashfullest man you ever saw, but he think's your wife's the prettiest woman out. And he's not far wrong. I'm as crazy 'bout her as he is. It ain't only that she's so pretty. Lots o' people are pretty. But I care a heap more for style; and, my! ain't she stylish? Seems like, do your best and pay your most, other folks can't get to look like Jenny. I tell her so to her face."

What could Struan say? His gentle heart was

aching for her,—the poor little butterfly that he had tried to turn into a Psyche. He seemed to see clearly at last that all she wanted was a day's basking in the sunshine of life, that she was the symbol of a soul, but not a soul.

If these were the people, if this was the companionship, in which she found pleasure, how he must weary her with his distant dreams of what was perhaps the unattainable, and his difficult strivings to get out of the present and into some greater and better future, to gain which meant ceaseless self-dedication, unremitting toil! Long ago he had proved that she could not take part in his ambitions and ideals. She had once said to him that, when he had gone so far in his career as to have a big name and a good income, she didn't see what more he wanted, and that it seemed to her foolish to work so hard. He had said nothing in reply; but that day had been one bitter era in his experience, and this was another.

As they were walking homeward after their visit to the Wallises, Jenny said abruptly:

"I knew you wouldn't like them. I never wanted to take you, so you can't blame me."

"Blame you! How could I?" he said kindly. "There is no blame in the matter."

"I told you they were not your sort," she said, a certain shade of resentment in her tones.

"They are not," he said, still in a very gentle tone. "Do you call them your sort, Jenny?"

He felt the hand upon his arm stiffen slightly, as if the whole figure grew more tense.

"Yes!" she said, half-defiantly. "I do. What's the use of pretending? I'm not clever, and I never will be. I don't care anything about books and theories and ideas. I like to enjoy myself with people that don't look down upon me, and that's the simple truth."

"Look down upon you, Jenny!" he said in a hurt tone. "My child, what are you thinking of?"

"Not you," she said in hasty amends. "I don't mean you. You are lovely to me always; but, whether you admit it or not, the people that you take pleasure in, the friends that you have tried and tried in vain to make my friends, you must know that they look down on me, that they only tolerate me for your sake."

"Not at all," said Struan, stoutly, smothering a little inward monition that contradicted his spoken words. "Many of my friends have liked and admired you for yourself alone."

"Oh, they think me pretty, I dare say, or they admire my voice or consider me jolly and amusing. But what has thinking me pretty got to do

with really liking me? And what do I care about my voice, when you won't let me sing?"

"But I do let you sing," he began.

"Oh, at home or in the houses of your friends! But I don't care for that. You won't let me go on the stage."

Struan winced inwardly, but his voice was without any hint of it as he answered:

"And do you still cling to that dream? Would you like to be an opera-bouffe singer?"

"Yes, I would," said Jenny, doggedly. "It would be some excitement, some pleasure, and make me of some importance."

"It's not that I wouldn't let you, Jenny. You know my views about marriage,—that a man has no more right to hinder his wife in an earnest career than she has to hinder him. I have never forbidden you to do this thing; but I do object to it and wish you not to do it, not because I exert any husband's authority over you, but because I give you the benefit of an experience that began before you were born."

This thought reminded him of Jenny's youth, and his heart grew gentler still toward her.

"Sometimes," he said, laying his hand tenderly over hers as they walked along, "I wonder if I am not too old for you, Jenny. Sometimes I fear you made a mistake."

"I have never attached any importance to that," said Jenny; "and, if I don't think you too old for me, it's no one else's business. It isn't that. That's not the trouble at all. But there's something, else why did I feel this evening, when I saw the difference between you and the Wallises, that I was more like them than like you?"

"Did you feel that?" he said.

"Yes, I did," she said stoutly; "and it is the truth. I am better educated than Ida Wallis, because I was ambitious from childhood to be a singer; and I worked for that purpose, and studied hard. But this made me in that point above my family and friends, though I am not so in other things. If you think the Wallises common, as I know you do, I wonder what you'd think of the people I was raised among and am related to."

"What have I to do with that? I care nothing whatever about it. I married you, and not the relations you have outgrown and left behind you. But tell me this about the Wallises: don't you think them common?"

"Yes, I do. I see that they are, because, living with you, I have got your point of view. In that light, I am common, too."

Struan started. His grasp upon her hand tightened sternly.

“Jenny,” he said, “don’t turn this subject into ridicule. It is a serious thing.”

“I know it. I am speaking seriously; and, seriously, I tell you that we had better understand each other. I’m not up to you in mind, in breeding, in association. I feel it all the time. Even when I am alone with you, I feel it; for I can see you have to go out of your own thoughts and interests when you talk to me, and I can see the effort it costs you. And it is such an effort to me to climb up to your interests that—being more honest than you, as I truly think—I don’t make the effort. When you come to think of it, we have very little common ground.”

This brutal fact,—so evident to his outward eyes, so sedulously guarded from his inward vision,—brought thus home to him, in Jenny’s outspoken way, was a blow the weight of which she little dreamed.

He did not speak in answer; but as they walked along, and now let themselves in at their own front door, she had a certain consciousness of his feeling that made her say in a loving sort of way:

“Don’t be sorry that you married me, Struan. It was more my fault than yours. You are not sorry, are you?”

“If you are unhappy, I am.”

"I am not exactly unhappy," she said, kneeling in a wicker rocking-chair that stood in the hall, and leaning against the top of it as she faced and looked at him, rocking gently all the time; "but you are such a big, broad-minded man that I should think you would understand how I feel in this perfect self-effacement."

"Self-effacement! Who ever wanted you to efface yourself? The idea is hateful to me. What do you mean?"

"I know you don't want it; but how can it be otherwise? You are an intellectual and important man, with ideas far greater than any I am capable of. Some women could find a career in sharing and helping you in these. I can't. It isn't in me. Simply, they are uninteresting to me. That's all there is about it. As long as you disapprove of my making myself a career in the only way that I can, there is nothing for me to do but reflect you."

"What! Reflect me? Do you suppose I married you to reflect me, or could ever so degrade my idea of wifehood?"

"Whatever you married me for, it amounts pretty much to that. Look around at this house. Contrast it with the Wallises'."

"Well," said Struan, misunderstanding her, "you can't hesitate as to which is best."

"This, of course! That's not the point. The Wallises' house is the ideal that I have had before me till I married you. This house does not, in the least, express me. So much the better, perhaps. But all I did in making this home was to find out your wishes and execute them. How much do I express myself in anything? I am not saying it in reproach. Circumstances may be at fault, but you have not been. No, indeed, you've been as good as gold to me, Struan; but don't you see, by this time, how little we are alike?"

She got out of her chair, left it rocking to and fro, and went and stood beside him, taking both his hands and looking up into his face.

"My poor darling child!" he said, stooping to kiss her forehead. "It will be hard for me to forgive myself if I make you regret your marriage to an old man more than twice your age."

"An old man!" she said, laughing. "That is absurd, applied to you. I don't regret my marriage, but I tell you frankly there is something wrong. I think I am of that inferior clay that likes to associate with its inferiors. I find pleasure in the Wallises because I am sort of a queen to them. With them and their friends I am always the most important figure in any gathering.

Frankly, I like it. Can't you understand how wearisome it gets to be always struggling up to your companions, and feeling that you do not reach their level, try all you can?"

There was something so honest in her, so like herself, with her candid, unpretending nature, that it made a strong appeal to Struan. He took her in his arms, and kissed her tenderly, and Jenny returned his kiss; but there seemed a whole world's distance between them, compared to that time a year ago when, in the first ardor of their passion for each other, it had seemed that nothing else was needed to make their love complete.

IX

STRUAN did not know it, but the motive at the root of Jenny's attitude in this conversation was her sense of uneasiness at the thought of Leonard's coming. Struan had shown her two or three of the boy's ardent letters; and, with her usual shrewdness and honesty with herself, she saw that he had idealized her enormously, according to his imagination of what the woman who had won his father's love should be. She shrank instinctively from being measured by such a standard. She had seen by a hundred significant signs that Struan himself had idealized her in a most uncomfortable way, and in her prosaic heart she was very tired of straining up to a standard which she could not reach and didn't really care to reach.

Indeed, there was but one idea that really inspired or stimulated Jenny,—that of making a career for herself in light opera. It was the only thing she really wanted; and, after the disappointment in her marriage,—fully acknowledged to herself,—she now recognized, in the possibility of this career, the fulfilment of her most ardent dream. She loved Struan, of course. She hadn't

stopped loving him ; but, really, it was folly for her to shut her eyes to the fact that they were not suited to each other.

She worked at her music harder than ever ; and Struan, who had no real doubt in his heart that her wish to please him was the paramount motive with her, encouraged and praised her in a way that made her eyes sparkle with what he supposed to be gratified love. In reality, it was the stimulus which his words gave to a hope which she had never resigned, and was nursing now with a greater fervor than ever before.

The time had come when Struan recognized the fact that as far as he personally was concerned his second venture in love had failed. He did not, however, recognize it as a failure as it affected Jenny. But Jenny knew that it had failed for her, too ; and, being shrewder than he, she suspected enough, as to his feelings, to cause her to watch him with close attention.

With her usual acumen, she had hit upon an important factor in the failure of this marriage ; and that was the difference in their ages. He was forty-three ; and to her, at twenty, this seemed old. He had seen, felt, and tasted deep of life. He had travelled over the world, seen society in many countries, tasted of adventure, danger, and

afterward of success. Now he had settled down to the calm of maturity, but he had had the delightful fever of youth before doing so. This she had never had, and her thirst for it was keen. She had been almost twenty before she had shaken herself free from the trammels of her birth and rearing; and from that point she had stepped at once into her present state of life, which seemed to her now more or less a bondage.

In the early months of her marriage she had made an effort to repress the ebullitions of youth and its wilful follies, which occasionally rose up in her; but lately, with a purpose, she had given these free vent, watching Struan carefully to see if they jarred. Undoubtedly, they did, although he made no outward sign.

There was one point on which, as Jenny knew, they were ardently agreed. Neither of them believed in a life which demanded self-suppression, in the sense of denying the natural and healthy human instincts; and she began to see her way clear to the making of a good argument, if she should ever decide to give him her reasons for thinking their marriage a failure.

Another point on which they felt differently was that of parenthood. Struan was disappointed that there was no child born to them; while Jenny, for her part, openly rejoiced.

X

WHEN Leonard had once fixed the day for his return, and written the date on which he was to sail, a fit of impatience, very characteristic of him, so took him in possession that, in his eagerness to see his beloved father, he hurried up his preparations so as to sail by a steamer coming three days earlier. The thought of taking his father by surprise so delighted him that he gave no warning of his being near; but one morning, when Struan was busy with his correspondence at the desk in his office, he heard the swing-door slam to very suddenly, and around the screen, all unannounced, came Leonard, both his arms outstretched, and the cry of "Father!" on his lips.

Struan sprang to his feet at sound of that familiar voice, his face irradiated with love and joy. In a moment they were locked in a close embrace; and then, in foreign fashion which was nature itself to their loving hearts, they kissed each other.

Then they drew apart, and looked in one another's eyes.

"My blessed father," said the boy, his dark eyes filling with tears, "what a joy it is to look at you again, and see your dear face just the same, only better and finer than I remembered it!"

"And to think that your father has to look up to you, Len! How wonderful it seems! My great, magnificent boy! God bless you!"

He stood with his hands on his son's shoulders, his face glowing with love. They were both powerful men, with vigor in every limb, ardor in every lineament. The affectionate comradeship which their looks and tones indicated gave an impression of equality that made them seem more like brothers than father and son. The difference in age, which he was so constantly reminded of with Jenny, he scarcely thought of with Len. There was a spiritual equality between the father and son which made this fact an insignificant accident; but, in the absence of that spiritual element, the point of age had a tremendous meaning.

As they sat down now together, the man and youth, on the old leather lounge where Struan and Jenny had once sat, there was a zest in the hearts and faces of both that made the hour a rare and precious one to them.

Leonard, in answer to his father's eager ques-

tionings, gave a hurried account of himself and the reasons that had led to his sudden and unexpected arrival.

This done, a slight look of embarrassment crossed his face ; and, with a certain shyness, he said laughingly :

“I am eager to see my new mother. I am prepared to love her instantly, and I am going to call her ‘mamma’ from the first.”

Struan felt his heart contract. So strong an inward throb could not fail to make its mark upon the countenance. It took the form of a sudden shadow that passed over his face, and left it pale.

“You will find her too young for that,” he said with a visible effort at ease. “She is not much more than your own age,—too young, I sometimes fear, for an old fellow like me, though she is too sweet to acknowledge it. You will make a friend of her, I know, Leonard, for my sake.”

“Indeed, I will, sir, if I can,” said Leonard, his face growing suddenly crimson from some inward and unexpressed emotion. He had divined that his father had some fear that he might not be likely to become the friend of his new mother, for her own sake. A great wave of compassion, on some unknown and unquestioned ground, rose over him.

“Father,” he said gently, “I have wanted often to say something to you. Let me say it now. As I have grown from a boy to a man, I have come to understand, in part at least, the extreme trials and difficulties of your life. I have not always fully understood you; but whatever you did, under any and all circumstances, whatever you may do now or in the future, is right and beautiful in my eyes, because it is you who do it.”

He did not know what feeling it was in his heart that compelled him to say this; but, when he saw the fervid gratitude it called up in his father’s beloved face, he was glad that he had obeyed his impulse.

“Your faith in your father is infinitely precious to him, Len,” said Struan, “and I think my motives you may safely trust; but don’t expect me not to make mistakes, for I seem doomed to them in one way or another.”

He looked away from his son as he spoke, and Leonard had an instinct that his words might have a special rather than a general application. His heart glowed with love and sympathy as he said:

“If ever there was blind faith in the world, sir, it seems to me that that is what my faith in you is. It makes it easier for me to understand what faith in God is. Millicent says it is a great deal

grander for being blind, and that, if we see that a being is good, we need ask for no further vision concerning him. Oh, sir," the young fellow broke off abruptly, with a change of tone and subject that was perhaps welcome to both, "I can never be satisfied until you know Millicent. Nothing that I or others have said, nothing that we might say, can give you an idea of her until you see her."

"Yes, tell me of Millicent," said his father, unconscious of a brief sigh which, however, Leonard had heard. "Tell me of Millicent," he repeated. "We used to play together as children; but I went off to college, and she to Europe, and we never met afterward. I'm glad you looked her up and claimed the relationship, though it is not a very close one. She grew up a beauty, I know, and a very accomplished woman. She's been tremendously admired, and I've often wondered that she never married."

"You wouldn't, sir, if you knew her," said Len, decidedly, "and knew the men that, in spite of the fact that she's past her first youth, are only too glad to flock about her, wherever she goes. There's no lack of them, more's the pity; for they are often in my way, and in hers, too, I believe. If she wanted an assorted lot to choose

from, she certainly would have it. There are big swells with titles and money galore; and there are literary men and artists and musicians and men of every sort, some brilliant and clever enough. Yet the very best of them, when looked at in the light of a husband for *Millicent*, shrivel to nothing! I used to get wild with rage, for fear she would marry some of these men, but that was before I knew her. It would be just as impossible for her to do it as it would be for me to imagine it. I am convinced that she will never marry, though she says I mustn't make too sure of it,—that, if she were to meet, at fifty or at sixty, the man that she could love, she would marry him at once! I don't think she will ever meet that man, however. So I am confident she will not marry."

"And it's pretty plain that you get comfort from the thought," said Struan, smiling. "I've seen from your letters what a charm she has for you. I've had a sort of notion that you were in love with her yourself."

"I am, indeed, sir," said the boy, with a frank smile, a flush rising to his cheeks. "She knows it perfectly, and laughs about it in the most maddening way. She used to say that, properly regulated, it was good for me, living in Paris in that way. She allows me to call myself her knight,

and to call her my lady ; and once in a while, but not often, I may kiss her hand. Oh, I long for you to know what she has been to me ! I've had terrible fits of depression now and then, without you to set me right ; and she told me to come to her at those times, and speak to her as frankly as I would to you. There is something hideous about Paris ; and at times the horror of it possessed me so that I would walk the streets all night, and even search out its hideousness. It seemed to me appalling that we should live gay and protected lives in the midst of such crime and misery, and content ourselves to shut our eyes to it. I worked myself into such a state at times that, if I had not had Millicent's presence and your example, I don't know what would have been the upshot."

"Yes," said Struan, earnestly, "I have never for an instant lost sight of what you were enduring. I went through it all before you. I spent my youth in Paris, and I sent you there deliberately. I knew you would be tried ; but I knew, also, that you would not fail."

"Oh, sir, but I'm not as strong as you. I am sure that, even as a boy, you were a stronger character. I used to tell Millicent the things you said to me in sending me out in the world. She

would question me about it often ; and I told her all,—how you intentionally put me to the proof to find out what stuff I was made of. I even told her that you had said that I had by nature high instincts and unusual gifts, and that you said, if I was going to throw these away, now was the time and Paris was the place,—that you had said to me, ‘If you can do it, do it.’ I told Millicent that you had assured me that I had forces in me which, well directed, would help the world, and that, in order to develop these to their highest, I must know from personal experience both good and evil, in order that I might intelligently choose one and reject the other ; I told her that you gave me a large allowance, that I might know that liberty and that danger ; and, lastly, I told her that you watched me with love from across the world, and trusted and believed in me. You see, sir,” he went on, “I remembered all that you said. I talked it over with Millicent so often. She used to say that she did not know whether you had been wise or foolish,—that it was magnificent, in a way, but that it showed a rather rash confidence in the unknown quantities of my strength and will. There is nothing I cannot talk to her about. Her mind is as clean as yours, sir, and just as free.”

Struan had listened with intense interest. Now he said :

“If I had realized that you were under the watchful care of such a woman, I should have been spared many an hour’s anxiety about you. With your own soul and hers to guide you, you couldn’t have gone wrong. But, even without Millicent, you would have come out all right.”

“Don’t be too sure of that, sir. You judge me by yourself. You would. Indeed, you did. But, without Millicent, I think I should have failed.”

Struan was silent for a moment. Presently he said, as if after deliberate thought :

“Yes, Leonard, I went through the ordeal of that Paris life almost unharmed. I came out of it strengthened, if necessarily somewhat saddened. But, then, my boy, what followed? I made the irretrievable mistake of a rash and unconsidered marriage. The pain which our absolutely unmatched natures brought to your poor mother grieved me as much as my own bitter disappointment. It has hurt me always, it hurts me even now, to think that another sort of man might have made her happy.”

“Father, don’t think of it,” said Len, tenderly. “I am sure you are wrong to blame yourself. I

am older now, and I have thought of it a great deal in these years of absence. My poor little mother would never, I am sure, have been happy in any marriage. She was not made for it. I want to tell you, sir, before we drop this sad subject, that I realize more every day how absolutely you did the best you could for her."

"I hope so, Len. I wanted to. I tried to with all my heart. As you say, it is a sad subject; but I introduced it purposely, to give you, at this important period of your life, a serious warning. Marriage, my son, to men like you and me" (Leonard's heart swelled with pride at this: to be called a man at all was still rather a novelty to him; but to be called a man like his father, the man of men to him!) "is the supreme fact in life. Wait with patience. Never think you love any woman in the perfect way until every side of your nature and every element of your being consents to it, demands it. The supreme object of my life now is to save you from making a mistake in marriage."

"How strange! That is precisely what Millicent thinks. She says she will save me from that tragedy at any cost. She wants me not to think of marrying, if I can help it, until I am twenty-eight. She says in some ways I develop slowly,

though in some of my thoughts I am mature. She wants me now to throw myself into my art, as she is doing. Oh, if you could see her painting! It is so strong and so delicate! And she's as humble! It was years before she would exhibit in the Salon; and then she made so little of all the praise she got, and said the most of it came from people who loved to flatter her. She declares I have ten times her talent, and only need some of her concentration. She has given me such beautiful feelings about my art, and has shown me how impossible it will be for me to do my best work unless I keep my life clean and my spirit pure. It's just what I've heard you say about your music, sir. It's wonderful how much you and Millicent think alike. Oh, how I do want you to see each other!"

"You are certainly her worshipper," said Struan, with an indulgent smile. "I should like indeed to see this paragon of women."

"That's exactly the way she talks of you, sir," said Len, laughing. "She says she has always been very proud to claim you as her cousin, as you are the only genius the family has produced; but at the same time she says that, when she meets you, she is certainly not going to expect that you or mortal man will come up to my estimate of

you. She is coming to America soon to make a visit to her grandmother. I want you to see how much she really cares for me. It humbles me in the dust to think of it, and makes me resolute to do something worthy of her. Oh, I long for you to see how beautiful she is, how different from all the rest of the world! I have her photograph, but it's a libel. Every one falls in love with her. It's been no end of fun to me to make her other admirers — men, and women, too — wild with jealousy. She's self-willed, in a way, and won't bore herself with people who are stupid; and so often she would let me carry her off by ourselves somewhere, when there were a dozen people trying to talk to her. I know how it will be when she arrives in New York. I'll go to meet the steamer, and there'll be a good many others who will do the same; and I can just see now how they will all look, and how she will look, when she just shakes hands all around, and then lets herself be whisked away by me."

Struan smiled at the boy's enthusiasm; but for some inexplicable reason, and although his own nature responded to all that his son said, he felt, all at once, strangely old.

Leonard was just the same, and yet there seemed to be a great accumulation of years on his part.

The boy's freshness and ardor were almost a surprise to him. He had always had that trick of addressing his father as "sir." It seemed an instinct with him to express this deference for his beloved parent, with whom he was at the same time so familiar.

XI

IT was out of the question to work any more that day. Struan put his letters and papers aside, and got ready to take Leonard home. It crossed his mind to wait till evening, and send Jenny a telegram meantime; but Jenny had a way of "dressing for company," and putting on also a company manner, that he had often seen with distaste. He preferred to take her by surprise, when she would at least be natural. Besides, he dreaded intensely the ordeal of introducing Leonard to Jenny; and, since it had to be done, he wanted to get it over. He had meant to say absolutely nothing to Leonard that might hint at a disappointment in his second marriage. He knew that the fact of his silence would be indication enough that things were not all that he had hoped. As the interview had turned out, however, he felt that Leonard was, in a measure, prepared to find Jenny somewhat different from what his ardent idealization of his father's wife had led him to expect.

When they reached the house and went up on the porch, Jenny was practising. The noise of

the piano prevented her hearing their footsteps; and, as they now stood still to listen, Struan felt an instant's sense of pride.

"What a charming voice!" said the younger man, in an enthusiastic whisper.

Struan nodded in a confident way, but at the same time his face showed certain signs of a disturbance that Leonard saw with pain.

They waited till the music paused; and then Struan, opening the Venetian shutters, stepped through the low window, and said in a voice whose heartiness was a trifle overdone:

"Jenny, I have a surprise for you. Here is Leonard."

Jenny sprang up in great confusion, putting her hands to her head where a row of curl-papers bristled. Then she looked down at her gown, which, though free and graceful in its lines, was neither fresh nor tidy. Then her face turned scarlet; and she gave Struan a look of indignant reproach, which had in it a certain gleam of bad temper.

"I never heard of such a thing!" she said. "What did you let him come here and catch me this way for?"

Poor Struan and poor Len!

The former began to apologize, saying sooth-

ingly: "It doesn't matter. You mustn't mind Len." While the latter, with the image of a *grande dame* so fresh in his mind, by way of contrast, felt a sense of pity for his father which almost choked him. A like feeling urged him at the same time to assume a manner of respectful homage, such as he would have shown to Millicent herself, as he came forward and said:

"I beg your pardon for coming in so uncere-
moniously. I hope you are not going to make a
stranger of me." And, reaching for her hand, he
carried it to his lips with a charming foreign
grace.

As soon as Jenny recovered her hand, she began
with nervous haste to take down her curl-papers,
blushing and half-crying with vexation as she
looked up at him, towering above her and above
Struan himself.

Even in that agitated moment it seemed to her
that she had never seen a more attractive young
creature. He must have been quite six feet three
in height, and his motions were full of ease and
grace. He had curly blond hair, the shadow of
a mustache, and long dark eyes that lingered on
the mind's retina long after he had turned away.
He was dressed with a careless elegance, and
carried with him a certain atmosphere which

made Jenny realize what poor imitations of fashionable young men had been the stage representations which she had seen.

It was all the more annoying that he should have caught her so. She felt furious with Struan for having put her in such a position. Making a rather awkward excuse for herself, she hurried away, saying she would go and order Leonard's room to be made ready for him.

Left alone, the two men, as with one consent, looked away from each other.

"Well, here are to be your quarters for a while," said Struan, glancing round the room; and Leonard, as he did the same, said:

"What a snug place you have here!"

"Yes, it's very comfortable, which is all we claim," said Struan. "Poor Jenny, she is mortified at her *déshabille*," he went on. "It was inconsiderate of me, but I did not think. You know I have a habit of not thinking, Len, about these little things that mean often so much to others. I have a way of walking with my head in the clouds, so they say."

"My dear father!" said Leonard, ardently, his voice almost choked with tears.

Somehow, it touched the father's heart too much. He could not bear the sweetness of this

subtle sympathy; and, saying hastily that he would speak to Jenny for a moment, he left the room.

Upstairs he found her scrambling wildly into a rather elaborate-looking dress, her face still flushed, and her hair distinctly over-curly from its recent release from confinement. She looked at him with a vivid vexation in her eyes, but did not speak.

"Forgive me, Jenny," he said. "I didn't think —"

"Oh, no, of course, you didn't think! It seems to me you might have thought. I never saw myself look a greater fright. I don't know what your son must think of me."

"Len will not mind," said Struan, soothingly, "if you only like him and make friends with him. It will not matter to him about your dress."

"It matters to me," she said fretfully. "I'll never get over the mortification of it as long as I live."

Struan felt keenly hurt. To think that the meeting of these two beings — his wife and his son — should have been spoiled by so insignificant a matter as a costume gave him a certain sense of bitterness. Things were either big or little to him, and dress was among the little things of life; while to Jenny it was one of the biggest.

"I'm sorry, dear," he said.

"I'm sure I think you ought to be," she answered in a tone more disagreeable than any he had heard her use. "For goodness' sake, go now, and take your son to his room. Harriet must have it ready by this time. I've got to go and see what on earth I can get for lunch. Oh, it's too bad!" she said, wrestling with the hooks of her dress, which fastened on her left shoulder, and which would not catch.

Struan had often performed this little service for her; and he went now, and said kindly:

"Let me do that, Jenny."

She permitted him to fasten it, but did not look at him.

"Never mind about lunch," he said. "Anything will do."

This glib and ambiguous phrase was singularly irritating to her, as it has been to many a housekeeper before her.

"Oh, yes, anything will do," she said; "but I don't suppose nothing will do, will it?"

She delivered this taunt with a little laugh, which Struan distinctly did not like. Then she left him, and went downstairs.

To Struan the meal was as unimportant as the costume, and he was grieved to have his son so

treated as a stranger in his house. It seemed to matter little to Jenny whether he was received with cordiality and affection or not, so long as she was becomingly dressed and could give him a creditable lunch. Struan's points of view were, without doubt, a little hard on Jenny. Life seemed to him often so simple where she found it complex, and so complex where she found it simple.

Leonard meanwhile was walking about like a stranger in the drawing-room of his father's house. The strangeness of the exterior, however, was little compared to the strangeness by which his inmost soul felt Jenny to be an alien, and knew that she must ever be such to him. He thought of his glorious father, and wondered how such a thing could be. He thought of Millicent, and wondered what her trenchant insight would make of this strange situation.

The one redeeming thing, so far, was Jenny's singing. Certainly, she had a lovely voice. Turning toward the piano, he was about to examine the music scattered there, when he noticed a glass half full of water standing in the midst of it, and, stuck to the side of the glass, a curious-looking gray thing that he could not at first make out. Stooping, that he might examine it better with his

short-sighted eyes, he discovered that it was a small wad of chewing-gum, which had already served its purpose,—in part, at least. He had been an American school-boy, and he knew what it was.

Divided between repulsion and amusement, he turned away, to meet his father's ardent welcoming eyes, as he said :

"Come, Len, your room is ready. Jenny has gone to look us up some lunch." And he took his son's arm affectionately, and led him upstairs.

Leonard felt a strong impulse to throw his arms around his beloved father's neck, and cry upon his breast. He controlled it, however; and they walked along, keeping up a rather perfunctory talk, until they reached the ornate apartment which Jenny called "the spare room."

Struan never had occasion to come here, and he scarcely knew it, so that its appearance now was something of a shock to him.

It was true, as Jenny had said, that in the arrangement of the house she had virtually effaced herself; and the rooms which Struan saw and made use of had been furnished according to his taste, and not hers. Jenny had managed to have it so without his really taking in the fact.

In "the spare room," however, Jenny had

worked her sweet will, aided by suggestions from Mrs. Wallis. True, she had had almost no guests; but it had been an amusement to her to execute here some of the fashion-book hints which she and Mrs. Wallis found so pleasing, so there were endless knick-knacks and kickshaws, which made the room look as trivial and meretricious as could well be.

To do Jenny justice, she had intended to make things more in accord with Struan's taste before the arrival of his son; but whose fault was it that she had not done so? After the catastrophe of the toilet and the lunch, this seemed a small affair.

To Leonard this overdone and trashy room represented a new tragedy in his father's life. Its effect upon him, therefore, was to make him feel more deeply tender than ever to this dear being, who, deserving the best in marriage as in all things, had, for some occult reason, fared so ill. There was too keen a sympathy between them for Struan not to divine, in part, what Leonard was feeling, — not the concrete essence of it, but there was an atmosphere of sympathy which his son's presence cast about him.

Leonard, for his part, felt afraid that his father would notice his making no comment whatever upon Jenny. So he took refuge in saying,

“What a charming voice —”

He got so far, and then stumbled. He felt utterly at a loss what to call her. He had meant to say “mamma,” but that was impossible. He could not call her “Mrs. Struan”; and to say “your wife” would, he feared, sound as if he wished to repudiate the relationship to himself.

“Yes, her voice is lovely. You must make her sing for you,” Struan answered, evidently perceiving the difficulty, but not helping him out of it. Then, as if by a sudden impulse, he put both hands on Leonard’s shoulders, and, looking up into his face, said earnestly :

“My son, this young and gifted girl has been very trustful of me. She has given up a great deal for me. She wanted to go on the stage, and she could have made a success in light opera. She gave it up for me.”

“More’s the pity!” was Leonard’s inward comment. Jenny seemed to him as admirably fitted to the career she had abandoned as she was unfitted to the one she had adopted. That little soubrette Lucien Struan’s wife! He felt as if it must be some disturbing dream from which he must awaken.

The lunch that followed seemed a part of that same dream. Jenny apologized for everything,

and, indeed, took up most of the talk, taking pains to make it appear that she knew what a good lunch was, and was not giving them such simple fare from ignorance. She had not got over her bad humor at being taken by surprise, and Struan thought he had never seen her appear to such disadvantage. He felt almost as sorry for Jenny as Leonard felt for him, so that the manner of the two men was more than ordinarily gentle and amiable,—a fact which made a certain resentment in Jenny's bearing the more apparent.

Leonard praised the lunch, spoke warmly of her voice and his eagerness to hear her again, and made himself so painstakingly agreeable that he overdid it a little ; and the shrewd Jenny saw the effort, and resented it.

After lunch she said she knew that they would want to smoke ; and so she excused herself, saying she had an errand to a neighbor's. A little later they saw her going down the walk and out into the street.

She went at once to her friend Ida's, and poured forth her woes into very sympathetic ears. Ida thought her grievance quite as important as she herself considered it ; and Jenny, under the provocation of her wrongs, allowed herself to speak more freely of her marriage and its consequences for her than she had ever spoken before.

The very fact of utterance made her woes more definite to her own consciousness; and, stung by the conviction that Leonard, for all his politeness, looked down upon her and pitied his father for his marriage, she spoke out for the first time a feeling that had long lurked unuttered in her mind.

"The truth is," she said, "I was a sentimental fool to marry a man old enough to be my father, who thinks and feels differently from me on every subject under the sun."

This was enough for Ida. She had always felt a sense of inferiority in Struan's presence that galled her; and now, following Jenny's lead, she expressed herself so freely as to the unfitness of the marriage that Jenny's long-practised habit of loyalty gave way before it, and she ended by having a hearty fit of crying.

The only thing that enabled her to rally from this was the recollection that she must meet Leonard again, and must not have red eyes. She did not care to see him, she would have been glad to avoid it; but, since it had to be, she wanted to do herself credit. She felt a certain sense of exhilaration at the thought of singing for this splendid young man. There, at least, she believed that she could impress him. She had a pretty just conception of the hopelessness of any attempt to do so, except in this particular.

But when the time for her triumph came, and though she had the support and comfort of feeling that she did herself full justice, there was an undoubted and inexplicable drop of bitterness even in this cup.

When Leonard asked her to sing, and she rose to comply, Struan at once offered to play her accompaniments.

“What is it?” he said. “What have you been practising?”

“This,” said Jenny, placing a sheet of music before him, and taking her place at his side with an air of satisfied confidence.

Struan ran over the opening chords with his master-touch that even in those few notes made Len’s heart swell, and then Jenny sang.

Her performance was unquestionably brilliant. To a naturally rich and charming voice was added the great advantage of Struan’s training, and she sang her selected song with an abandon that was admirable. Had Leonard heard it on the French stage, he would have applauded heartily; but, hearing it so, and realizing that this dashing little singer was his father’s wife, he felt a powerful sense of protest, which was immeasurably deepened as he watched his father’s face.

“Bravo, Jenny!” said Struan, as the song con-

cluded. "I am certain that Len has never heard that better done."

It was true, and Len made haste to say so. But was it worth the doing? All work well done was that, he told himself; but this rollicking bit of opera-bouffe,—was it the sort of thing for Struan's wife? Distinctly *no*!

And Jenny, who was quick to mark effects, felt that there was something in her performance that grated as well as something that pleased.

Still, Leonard thanked her, almost enthusiastically, and asked her to sing again. When she definitely declined, however, he did not insist. Then, as Struan still sat at the piano, the younger man drew nearer, and said with emotion:

"Play to me, father. I have not heard you for so long, and there is nothing to me in the whole world of music like your playing."

And Struan played, sonorously, powerfully, passionately, on and on and on, while Leonard sat and listened. When the music ceased at last, they looked into each other's eyes with a sense of understanding which comforted both hearts. After that, it seemed that words were not much needed between them.

When they thought of Jenny, and looked around for her, they found that she was gone.

XII

NEXT morning, early, Jenny came to Struan with a request. Mr. and Mrs. Wallis, she said, were going for a week to the seashore for a little pleasure trip; and she wanted to go with them.

The very eagerness that Struan felt to grant her request made him hesitate, and she had more difficulty than was common in getting his consent to her plan. There was no reasonable ground of objection to it, however, except his own lack of liking for the Wallises; and, as he had no basis for that but an instinctive one, he felt that he had no right to deny her this pleasure.

So she went; and Struan was left alone with his dear son.

Leonard's luggage arrived, and he had begun his unpacking, when, in the midst of it, Struan knocked at the door.

"Come in, sir," he said eagerly, rising from his knees before a big trunk. "I'll talk to you in a minute. I've been getting out some presents that I've brought to different people. I've got several little things for you, sir; but the most important of these is still in the custom-house."

He turned, and resumed his rummaging in the trunk; while Struan walked about the room, picking up and laying down the boy's various small belongings, all of which had for his father a significance and interest.

Presently Leonard, kneeling before the trunk with his back turned, heard himself addressed by a summoning voice, almost stern in its concentration.

"Leonard," it said; and he started to his feet, surprised.

His father looked at him over a photograph that he held in his hand, and said, almost with agitation:

"This is Millicent?"

There was an interrogative inflection in his words; but there was absolute conviction in his tones.

"Oh, you have found it!" said Leonard. "I was looking for it to show you. What do you think of it?"

"Think of it? I don't think of it. My soul salutes it. Great heavens, what a face!"

Leonard had never heard his father put such force into an exclamation before; and yet he spoke low, and as if more to himself than his son. He stood as if rapt in the contemplation of this

picture, holding it first close to his eyes and then far off, as if to get the broad view.

“What a face!” he said again, and this time with some recognition of his companion’s presence. “Never did I see face of man or woman express so much. What nobility in the curve of that head! What intellect in that brow! What purity, courage, humor, in those eyes! What spirituality and what passion in that mouth! Every one of these is as apparent as is the physical beauty.”

“Oh, sir, it thrills me to hear you speak of Millicent so. What will you think when you see her, for that picture is a poor thing? She has every one of those things that you’ve said; and she is, besides, cultivated and witty beyond any woman I have ever seen, and sympathetic to a miracle. Then she’s so perfectly well-dressed,—so independent and individual; and she’s *grande dame*, too, I can tell you. I can hardly wait for you to see her, sir. I want you to thank her for all she has done for me. Think of it! I have never felt myself worthy to kiss the spot of carpet where her beautiful feet have rested; and yet, when I was leaving, what do you think she did? She reached up with both hands, and pulled my head down, and kissed me, first on one cheek and then on the

other. Then — oh, *how* I can see her! — she drew back, still holding my head, and looked into my eyes, and laughed. I could never describe to you how Millicent looks when she laughs like that. Her eyes get long, and twinkle between their dark lashes; her lips just part a little, and show her white teeth; and the corners of her mouth go in, and get deep. She looks like a child and a sage and a sprite, all in one. Sometimes I fancy,” he added with a change of tone, “that, if Millicent were not good, she’d be very bad; for I believe she can do what she likes with men.”

“I can understand it,” said Struan, still looking at the picture. “I made allowance for your boyish rhapsodies, Len; but there is no denying what there is in this face. I respect and believe in you, my boy,” he went on; “but I devoutly thank the Lord that she is good, and not bad. If it had not been so, you would have had a danger far beyond any that my youth ever knew. As it is, she has done you a service, which you are too young and ignorant to understand, in having realized your ideal of woman. *Now*, if you should ever sink below your highest possible, you will be faithless and cowardly, indeed. I am determined, my son, that you shall realize your rare, your almost unparalleled good fortune, and the demand which

this woman makes upon your life. I think you do understand it better than most would. I have dealt with you frankly from childhood. I have not failed to impress upon you my conviction that the relations of man and woman is the most important factor in human existence, and that love is the master-passion. The thing of all others in which it seems to me that the times are out of joint is in the mistakes which men and women make on the question of marriage; and those mistakes spring oftenest, I believe, from the fact that neither men nor women are so blessed, usually, as to have an ideal in the opposite sex to live up to. If it so be that boys and young girls create such an ideal out of their own pure and beautiful imaginations, contact with life is apt to disappoint and destroy it. Why is this? One cause must be, I think, that the ideal of marriage—I speak especially of men—is so low, so selfish, so unspiritual. It is that which has kept this woman from marrying,—God bless her! Her life is maimed and incomplete, as every unmarried life is, whether man's or woman's, and I know that in her heart she feels it so; but it has the compensation of truth to its ideal, a far better thing than a makeshift marriage could give. In knowing such a woman as this, my boy, you've got a safeguard for

your future life which should make a mistaken marriage impossible to you. With the memory of the mistake which clouded my early life, this assurance for you is invaluable to me."

He had not said that his later marriage had been a mistake, Leonard noticed; but neither had he said that it had not been. The boy felt that he understood his father, and even that his father was willing to be understood by him, though it would have been impossible for him to put it into words, —the confession that his second marriage also had been a mistake.

"Oh, sir, I shall never marry, I am sure," said Leonard. "Not that I don't long for it, and should feel myself, as you say, stunted and blighted without it; but, after knowing Millicent, I feel that it would be impossible for me to marry any other woman."

His father looked at him seriously for a moment. Then he smiled.

"I'm going to make a guess," he said. "Have you not, perhaps, thought more or less seriously of marrying Millicent herself?"

A flush flew over Leonard's face, and he laughed with an embarrassed consciousness, as he said:

"Yes, sir, I used to think of it a great deal once. I don't know whether I should ever have

got up the courage to mention to her such an impertinence ; but she guessed my thought one day, and questioned me about it."

"And did she think it an impertinence?"

"Not in the least. She treated it quite gravely, and told me that she had spoken of it in order that I might look it in the face, and banish it at once. She even said, sir, that she did not look upon even so great a difference in age, and on what is usually considered the wrong side, too, as so great an obstacle to happiness in marriage as others which were disregarded every day,—such as lack of love, lack of respect, lack of congeniality. She has her own ideas, sir ; and one of them is that true companionship and sympathy are the right basis of marriage. She said she felt it not impossible that she might meet with these in a man much her junior in years, but with a mind which was the likeness and equal of her own, and that, if she did, she would consider the accident of age a non-essential. She even pointed out to me that those marriages which she had known under such conditions had turned out uniformly well. She thinks this is because the women were chosen for their mental and spiritual qualities rather than the physical ones which are apt to regulate a man's choice, that the real rather than the apparent settled the

thing. There is good sense in that, don't you think so, sir? But, all the same, she went on to tell me that, in the case of herself and me, she did not recognize the elements of a true union. She said that, both in mind and nature as well as in years and experience, I was far too young for her; but she did say — oh, sir, I never can forget that she said that! — that, if she had met me twenty years ago, when there really might have been a proper equality and adjustment between our natures, it might have been possible. Think of that!”

“It will be, as it ought to be, a precious memory for you always, my boy; and I am proud and glad for you that you have it. Whether Millicent is right in her theory that it is the minds and spirits of men and women that should be equal rather than their mere bodies, I do not know. It is an interesting idea. For myself, I have thought differently; and I have reproached myself at times for fear that I might have wronged the trustful girl who gave herself to me so unquestioningly, in the very flower of her youth.” He paused a moment, then looked at Leonard keenly, and went on: “You are too shrewd, my son, where your father is concerned, not to see clearly. Already it must have become apparent to you that

Jenny and I have some of our interests apart. I have yielded to an inevitable necessity in having it so, but any blame there may be in the matter rests with me. She trusted herself so nobly and so ardently to me that it shall be always, as it now is, the first duty of my life to make her happy,—as happy as I can.”

Leonard's face was clouded.

“Must unhappiness be forever the price of greatness?” he said. “If you are to feel that you cannot make this young girl happy, how you will suffer! O my dearest father,” he added in his affectionately impulsive way, “it seems to me that you must have suffered enough.”

“No,” said Struan, throwing back his head and bracing his shoulders squarely as he looked at his son with a smile, “I have had as much as my share, perhaps, of life's pain, but no more. When I see the human race—such a vast, unending multitude—climbing the steep hill of life, each bearing his load, I should be sorry to walk in that throng unburdened. My shoulders are strong; and I should rather wish to take the load of those who are weaker, and let them go free. That would be my choice, and a man who has what he truly considers the better part has no reason to complain. I do not call myself unhappy. Of all

contemptible traits that I know, the sentiment of self-pity seems to me the weakest. Look at Byron. What eloquent volumes he wrote on the subject of his own woes! How he called on gods and men to pity his sad case! As if any one could give pity to a man who so overweeningly pitied himself!"

The conversation was interrupted here, and not again renewed.

In point of fact, Struan was now at what seemed to him the dreariest point in his life journey. His love for Jenny, fed from one only of the many sources which go to supply the continually recurring demands of marriage, had long ago begun to wane. The consciousness of this was an almost greater pain to him than any that he had known before. It was not an ignoble pain, for he suffered more on her account than on his own. He felt that, if he could keep the knowledge of his disappointment from her, he could bear it. If not,—if she found it out in all the depth and breadth of its meaning,—it seemed to him that it must almost overwhelm him.

XIII

JENNY stayed away a week ; and, in the few hastily scrawled notes that she sent back, she expressed herself as being so delighted with her experience and surroundings that Struan felt free to abandon himself, without compunction, to the delight of being alone with his son.

It was a wonderful week for them both, for Leonard's youthful freshness enriched his father as much as Struan's matured but equally ardent enthusiasm of life enriched the son. There had always been an extraordinary affinity between these two ; but, as Leonard had grown from boyhood to manhood, the congeniality of their natures was broadened and intensified. They had long talks together, extending sometimes far into the morning hours ; and, besides this, they visited together, took little excursions, and, best of all, went together to hear music. Leonard did not play nor sing ; but he had an exquisite sensibility for music, and a very good knowledge of its theory. Besides this, he had had access all his life to the very best in music ; and his taste had been cultivated by his father's direction from the time he was a boy. In

this way he had set up so high a standard that Jenny's brilliant mediocrity was rather a trial to him than otherwise. He knew the sort of music that his father loved and craved, and it seemed to him that Jenny's pretty trolling must make Struan feel almost as would a starving man, if a plate of strawberries were offered him.

One evening the father and son had dined in town with friends and had gone to a concert afterward, reaching home after midnight. It had been a delightful and inspiring time; and yet, somehow, the thought of Jenny knocked at the door of Struan's heart. Since Leonard's return he had seen more of his former friends and associates,—the people in whose company poor Jenny was ever such an alien, and among whom Leonard was so much at home. Many of these people were relatives or early friends; and Struan had found the renewal of the intercourse with them, which came about through Len's return, so delightful that it served as a sort of warning to him. For, in spite of all his love for Leonard, Jenny's was the strongest claim that he recognized in his life.

To-night, as he and Len returned to the house which Jenny's companionship had made home to him, there was a certain wistful compunction in his heart.

When he opened the door with his latch-key and let himself into the hall, the first object that met his eyes was Jenny's immense travelling trunk. Could she have returned? It must be so.

It was no great surprise to him, for she had said in her last letter: "Expect me when you see me. I may come any time." And he had answered by rather urging her to come back as soon as she could do so without spoiling her visit. She was an independent body, and never cared to be met at trains, so there was nothing startling in the present occurrence. Yet, somehow, he felt strangely moved by it.

In the dining-room he found the remnants of a hurried lunch: also one of Jenny's gloves had been left upon the table. Evidently, she was here.

Dismissing Leonard to his own room, he went to Jenny's. Opening the door softly, he saw that she was in bed and fast asleep. The light was turned low; and, crossing to her side, he stood for some moments looking down at her.

She looked very young, almost childish. How could he ever have thought that a girl with that essentially youthful face, on which experience had not stamped one trace, could have been the companion of his world-worn years, the sympathizer with his saddened manhood? It was impossible.

Never since the very first months of his marriage had he tried to talk to Jenny of the deep things of his life. She was a primitive creature, and the problems that seemed difficult to him were simple to her. She believed frankly in having what you wanted without too many qualms as to how you got it. She had a strong will and a stout spirit, a nature as free from morbidness and scruples as that of a savage.

Struan, who had looked at her always through the glorifying medium of his own idealizing, was precluded from a critical judgment of her nature and character. As he looked down at her now, the tears came into his eyes. A poignant pity for the mistake that she had made came to him, with the full consciousness that his second marriage had been no more a marriage of true minds than the first. There was some element at work in him to-night which made the weight of his compunction heavy.

Intentionally, he made a noise, in the hope of waking her. He wanted to speak to her, to take her into his arms, and tell her how fervently he vowed to cherish and protect and love her all his life.

When she slept on, undisturbed, he bent over, laying his strong brown hand on her little dimpled one, and softly calling her name.

Jenny opened her eyes with a sleepy frown, and blinked at him for a moment. Then she said half petulantly :

“ Oh, don't wake me up. I'm nearly dead with sleep. Put that light out of my eyes.” And, rolling over in bed, she drew a long breath, composed her little body in a yet more relaxed position, and was asleep.

He put the light out, stepping softly, and left the room, noiselessly closing the door.

It was many hours that he lay on his bed, restless and self-tormented. What a miserable mistake he had made of his life ! How he seemed to blight whatever he touched ! He could not help feeling, because he knew in his own heart that his love for Jenny was waning, that the fact must, somehow, make her unhappy. But then he would tell himself that that was impossible, since the secret was still his own ; and he resolved anew that she should never know it. He thought, with a dull, deep pain, of the woman that he had first married ; and he wondered again how it would have been with her, had he left her life untouched by him. His common sense told him that it would have made no difference, as physical ill-health and melancholy discontent seemed inherent with her. Yet he imagined that perhaps another man might

have known how to lighten her burdens as he had not known.

To-night there came to him a clearer vision than he had ever had before. He saw the mistakes of his life with perfect distinctness. His supreme error had been in having lowered his ideal of marriage and of woman. Even in boyhood he had had that ideal, and he had been aware of certain twinges of conscience for his unfaithfulness to it at the time of his first marriage. That, however, he could forgive himself on the ground of youth. What he could not forgive himself was his second marriage. In the recoil of his nature from the narrow-mindedness, prudishness, pietism, lack of feeling, in his first wife, he had imagined that a woman who contradicted all these traits as absolutely as Jenny did must make him happy. But now he asked himself why he had been so blind as to stop here in his requirements. The answer was obvious. His faith had faltered. He had been so weak, so foolish, so blind, as to accept as final the witness of his own limited experience, and to believe that the woman of his ideal did not exist. He had sought her so long in the social life of cities, in the free life of Bohemia, in the isolated life of the country, and had sought her in vain. So he had given up, like a coward, and had accepted a compromise.

The pressure of life was harder on him, in a way, to-night than it had ever been before. The explanation of this lay, probably, in his meeting with his son. Leonard's nature was much like his own; and to have seen and talked with this boy, who stood at the threshold of the youth which he looked back upon, made his mistakes seem the more flagrant. There were, however, two thoughts of comfort to be gathered from his present situation. One was that he could watch and warn Leonard, to keep him from a like mistake. The other was that he could cherish, protect, and, he hoped, brighten Jenny's life. He still believed that she was happier with him than she could have been without him. He was able to gratify abundantly her youthful whims for clothes and jewelry and pleasure trips, and he knew that he had a love for her which would last her all her life, if she had need of it.

He fell asleep at last, soothed by the thought that it was left to him at least "to consume his own smoke" and to cast a clear light on the pathway of two dear beings,—his beloved son and the still dear little creature whom he had made his wife.

It was fortunate for Struan that he was at this time extremely busy. He was working with all

his rare energy of body and concentration of mind on the preparations for a great musical festival which he was to conduct in New York a little later. He pressed Leonard into service as his assistant, and made him useful in many important ways, his pride in the big fellow, when he would introduce him as his son, giving him a joy that made his face radiant.

Leonard, on the other hand, compelled his father to break through the rule of years past, and go with him occasionally into society. He even beguiled him to a ball, where Struan would have been intolerably bored but for his pleasure in watching his great handsome boy, towering above the rest of the company, as he strolled about with a certain foreign grace, which was recently acquired and which was observed with undisguised interest by pretty girls and gracious mammas. Young Struan was shortly to come into a very good property by inheritance from an uncle for whom he had been named; and, besides this, his family connections were of the best. The father was looked upon in his own family as decidedly erratic, because of his having adopted the career of a musician; but he had made himself so distinguished in his line that they were all more than willing to acknowledge him now.

The ball was a large and brilliant one. Leonard, fresh from Paris, with the garments and manners that betokened a thorough *usage de monde* in spite of his boyishness, with his distinguished height, his reputation as a promising young artist, and with a certain unusualness which came from a controlled discontent with his surroundings, was to many, an interesting figure in the room.

He danced with each of the beauties, who found his dancing delightful. The bow with which he handed them back to their chaperons was the perfection of serious good breeding; and it had in it, moreover, a certain air of finality, due, perhaps, to the fact that in no case did he dance a second time with any one. It was noticed that he talked little. Certainly, he would not have been taken here for the eager, ardent fellow that he was. Once or twice only his set features were seen to break into a smile of light, and then it was when he caught his father's eye resting upon him affectionately.

"Jove! what a set of brutes, sir!" Leonard said once, leaving a party of young men with whom he had been talking, and joining his father. "And the girls, too! They are a set of dressed-up dolls, and seem not to know what ideas mean. If this is society, sir, you need not fear its allure-

ments for me. Give me rather forever the Latin Quarter and the painter beggars and the jolly little French grisettes. It seems to me, by all odds, a worthier life. Or give me, better still, a life in the country, with the power to make pictures ; or, best of all, some long quest of danger and daring for Millicent's sake."

Struan smiled contentedly. His son's dissatisfaction in these things was joy to his heart. There was a wonderful quality in the man's smile. All the marks of care and pain that were on his face seemed suddenly to disappear, leaving only radiance behind. Surely, if a man could smile like that at ninety, he must still look young. This thought, or something like it, occurred to Leonard as he met that smiling glance.

"What a thing it is to be your son, sir!" he said. "The only real pleasure of the evening has been in having my hand wrung now and then by some pleasant old chap who greets me as Lucien Struan's son. Not that I call you old, sir," he added hastily: "any man younger than you seems to me crude and immature; but, somehow, all the men who were your college chums and contemporaries seem so much older. Can't we get away from this now, sir, and go somewhere and have a smoke and a talk? I have so much

to talk over with you that this seems a terrible waste of time."

They did soon after make their escape, equally pleased to be alone together. It was a comfort to Struan to know that he need have no fear that his son might, as many of his family had done, slip into the life of a social idler.

The one or two dinners which they took together with Struan's friends were much better than the ball. Leonard was very eager, and anything that deserved the name of life was interesting to him. Most of the men at these dinners had tasted of life deeply in some way or other. There were travellers, scientists, musicians, actors, authors, among them, to whose words the boy listened with an absorption which they found extremely stimulating. Struan noticed a fine respect in Leonard's manner to older men, though he put himself wonderfully on a level with them as an investigator and student of life. And these men themselves spoke and listened to Leonard with an interest and attention no less gratifying to his father.

In Leonard, at least, Struan was happy. What situation has not its compensations? From that sad, early marriage had come this wonderful boy. Certainly, that mistake seemed justified by it. But what about the second, greater, more irretrievable mistake?

XIV

ONE morning, on going to his office, Struan found a box awaiting him. It proved to be the present that Leonard had spoken of, which had been detained at the custom-house. Opening the box, Struan took out a rather small canvas, on which was painted a head of Leonard. His face kindled with interest at the first glimpse which he caught. He went to set it against the wall, at the end of the grand piano; and, as he did so, a bit of paper stuck in the back of the stretcher caught his attention. The words on it were :

Leonard Lucien Struan.

Painted for Leonard's father by Millicent Evleth.

Struan stood some minutes looking at this bit of paper. The handwriting had an individuality that interested him. Presently he propped the picture against the wall, and then seated himself on the music-stool, the piano's length away from it. He looked at it steadily.

"Oh! Wonderful!" he said aloud, with a smile and a toss of the head that conceded the point at once.

Then he leaned forward, resting his folded arms

upon the keys of the piano, and making a discord of sound. He appeared not to notice it, however, as his gaze grew serious in its concentration on the picture.

It impressed him in two ways. He was a judge of painting, and he saw that this picture possessed a certain quality which stimulated interest in the painter. What sort of head and hand was it that had produced this unusual effect? There was fine art here; and there was more, besides. A disciplined hand had held the brush; but what manner of spirit was it that had put on canvas the mystery of that young face? Struan gazed on the beloved features till his heart was stirred to tears.

This was more than a picture of Leonard's features and coloring. It was the picture of his soul, pure, passionate, intense, and waiting to be wrought upon for good or evil. Never had his responsibilities as a father so come home to him. Never had he felt a deeper emotion of thankfulness than now, at the thought that this woman would be his helper in sending Leonard out to the battle of life equipped with arms and armor.

Millicent was a wonderful being. He felt this intensely. Without having seen her since she was a passionate, imperious child, he realized her more actually than the women he had known for years.

Her photograph, her writing, her painting,—all of these indicated the same remarkable personality. The same impression was stamped on Len himself, in whom his father recognized a subtle change that dated from the beginning of his acquaintance with this woman. The influence of the ideal which she had set up for him could be seen in almost everything that he did.

Struan rested long in the contemplation of that picture, seeing beyond it into its creator's heart. It fascinated him also because of its unusual method. Evidently, it had been rapid work. It was done with a daring broadness, dashed on with the fire of enthusiastic impulse. At last, roused by the physical discomfort of his arms upon the keys, he moved, making again that discord of sound. It jarred his senses painfully this time; and, to put it quite to flight, he began to play.

As he played on, a deeper and deeper feeling glowed in his dark eyes. The youthful inspiration which had once made him believe that he should one day be a great composer stirred passionately in his heart. He had not known feelings such as these for years. He was tasting again, in his matured and saddened manhood, the nectar of youth. The blood beat throbbingly through his veins to his heart. Purposes and aspirations almost forgotten came flocking back.

What a great man, in every deep and honest sense, he had expected to become! And what was the indomitable force in his life which had held him back? There could be no doubt of that. It was the repeated wrong of two mistaken marriages. Other men might carve out their destinies independent of the influence of woman; but not he! That sympathy, inspiration, companionship, was his supreme need. He felt his life crippled because he had it not. He knew that without it he should never realize his best, that without the complement of woman he was imperfect and inadequate.

He had stopped playing; and he leaned some moments with his elbows on the music-rack, and his face hid in his hands.

He looked up at last, and saw Leonard's beautiful, hopeful face confronting him. The comfort of it stole into his heart. He had still one splendid thing to live for,—to help this boy to realize his best, to hold him back from the fatal errors by which he had ruined his own life. If he felt strong to do this and certain of gaining his end, his confidence came not from any power in himself. It was in his ability to point to the ideal clothed in flesh, the like of which, if he had known, his youth and manhood had been saved alive.

XV

MISS EVLETH'S object in coming to America was to visit her grandmother, who, after living abroad for some years, had come back to her old country home near New York.

Millicent's parents were dead; and the aunt with whom she lived in Paris was her father's sister, while old Mrs. Milner was her grandmother on the maternal side.

Leonard met his lady at the steamer, and, as he had predicted, took her out of the hands of a score of welcoming friends, and carried her off to himself.

It was like bringing fairyland bodily to this nineteenth-century earth,—to be driving along the New York streets, over bumping cobble-stones, with Millicent at his side. Her very costume was food for contentment to Leonard. How could anything so simple give such an effect of extraordinary charm? Her voice, too, after the vibrant twang of some of his recent acquaintances, was a thing to make him close his eyes and rest. It was the same with her accent and utterance;

and, as for her smile, when she turned it on him, her eyes made long and shadowy by half-drooped lids, he felt that it was of no use to try not to worship her. Anything short of worship was nonsense.

She was a good deal exhausted from the voyage, which had been rough; and an air of physical weariness made her seem gentler than usual. Ordinarily, her attitude toward the world was one in which there was no danger of self-betrayal. Leonard had seen her many a time without that mask, but he had seen her wear it so uniformly with others that he was well aware of his privileges.

On their way to the country they had a delicious talk, which Millicent inaugurated by saying, "Well, how's the Prince of Wales?"

Leonard glowed with delight at the revival of this old joke. Millicent had long ago applied this title to his father, because of Len's habit of addressing him as "sir." He had a graphic way of repeating his conversations with his father, and the frequent recurrence of this word had amused Millicent at first; but, when she saw the sort of romantic respect that it rested upon, she declared that she liked it. He never used it to any other man, no matter how much his senior he might be.

Millicent then proceeded to draw the young fellow out, as she was practised in doing. While she alternately soothed and laughed at him, he detailed his grievances concerning the society of which he was supposed to form a part. He ended by declaring that, but for his father, he would pack up his traps and go to Paris, never to return.

"You would find society there the same," she said, "and, in some senses, worse. Your knowledge of Paris is Bohemia. What did you know of the social life?"

"I knew you."

"And I'm an American. Besides that, I'm a Bohemian, too, to those who know me. I'm located by circumstances in society, but those who know me understand that it is not my real element. Neither is it yours. Our element, yours and mine, is the world, is life, wherever it is honestly expressed; and life in all places that are acting, growing, and feeling, is about equally interesting, I imagine. There must be most interesting people in such a great and progressive city as New York, for instance."

Leonard seemed a little reluctant to admit it.

"Besides," Millicent went on, "there's your father. *There's* a great man. He has spent his

life in nourishing and stimulating the weak and timid sentiment for music which this country has, and has accomplished, single-handed, miracles almost. He has shown himself quite superior alike to disappointments and rewards. You know by hearsay; but I remember when a brilliant career was offered him abroad, and he would not even consider it, because he felt that his services were owed to his country. It is fine, when you stop to think of it,—a thing, I'm pretty sure, he's never done."

"How do you know my father so well?" said Leonard. "It often surprises me."

"Oh, it's a sort of intuition that I've had about him always; and then, too, I judge him a little by his son."

Leonard flushed.

"Never do that," he said. "I implore you not to. There are two things which make me beside myself with impatience to be and do something good. One is that I am my father's son. The other is that I am your cousin and your friend and your knight."

Millicent smiled, gently and seriously. She had learned exactly how to control Leonard's ardor about her, when it got beyond discreet limits. She knew now that the boy was in a mood in

which he longed to throw himself at her feet in the carriage, and kiss the soles of her shoes.

So she broke in on the concentration of his mood by saying seriously :

“Tell me about your father, Len, and tell me about his wife. I am anxious to have in words the impressions that you could not write. Don’t hesitate to speak freely. I am prepared for what you have to say. I know by your very silence that this marriage has been a mistake.”

They had left the city behind them, and were driving on a country road. It was growing late, and the gathering dusk made their faces indistinct to each other. The knowledge of this was a relief to Millicent ; for, as she listened to Leonard’s brief story, she felt a stronger sense of regret than she was willing to show.

When Leonard ceased speaking, he waited for her to make some comment. It was several moments before she did so. Then she said :

“Poor Lucien Struan ! There seems to be a curse attached to qualities such as his. But, if the curse is for him and the greatness is to benefit the world, I imagine he can be content.”

“How well you know him, Millicent ! It’s very strange, for he seems in some mysterious way to have the same sort of instinct about you.”

At this point the carriage turned into the familiar old entrance to her grandmother's place, which Millicent had not seen for years. Old Mrs. Milner was a relative of Leonard's, also; and he had arranged with her that he was to bring Millicent out to her. He was a favorite with the old lady, and she had begged him to spend as much of his time as possible with her during her grand-daughter's visit.

XVI

THE occasion of Struan's first meeting with Millicent was a picture exhibition, at which the works of some young American artists studying in Paris were shown.

It was the day after her arrival that, in fulfilment of an agreement made with his son, Struan went to the exhibition rooms to meet Leonard and his fair lady. It made him smile to think of Leonard's excitement in the approaching meeting. He was deeply interested in it himself; but his life was an active and practical one, and just now intensely busy. He had not much time for the dreams in which he had indulged on seeing Millicent's photograph and her portrait of Len. The busy life seemed now the real and important one; the other, impalpable and impractical.

Struan's work had gone well that morning, and he was feeling and showing that spirit of buoyancy and *bonhomie* which all the disappointments of his life had not been able to crush out of him.

Many of the people present were known to him; and he was stopped, almost before he had crossed the threshold, by the warm greetings of

friends. It was no wonder they were glad to see him, for he showed such cordial pleasure in meeting them. There were old people, young people, and children among them; and whenever any one of them said, "There's Mr. Struan!" there was a ring of genuine feeling in their voices.

His manner, as he exchanged these greetings, was really that of a happy man. Indeed, there was an element in Struan's nature which made prolonged and unrelieved gloom impossible to him.

Very soon he caught sight of the pair for whom he was looking. They were easily distinguishable, not only because of Leonard's height, but also by reason of a certain unusualness in the appearance of his companion, who also appeared tall, even when standing by Len. Her back was turned; and her figure, in its foreign-made costume, was distinguished as well as beautiful. Struan's sense of pleasure in this meeting quickened as he looked at her. The pair turned and were moving toward him. At the same moment they caught sight of him.

Struan's face was as eager as Leonard's could have been, as he came up with both hands outstretched, and took Millicent's in a cordial grasp. Leonard, looking on, grew pale with the emotion of this moment.

"What a joy this is, my dear cousin!" Struan said. Leonard saw him fix his eyes on her as if his gaze were cleared of every impediment that kept him from seeing straight into her soul.

As Millicent, smiling, too, returned the greeting, Struan's mind was working in a whirl. Had he obeyed the impetuous promptings of his nature, he would have flung his hat up to the ceiling, and given a cry of triumph.

Leonard listened, wordless, while they talked.

"I remember," said Struan, holding her eyes with that intense gaze of his which seemed to create for them a world apart, and to shut out, as with an impassable barrier, the world of fashion and convention by which they were actually surrounded,— "I remember when one of your pet canaries died, and how inconsolable you were because your mother would not allow you to kill its mate to be buried with it. You cried more over the living bird than the dead one, and would not look at it because you felt that it reproached you with its life, and for not using the power you possessed to prevent this separation from its mate."

"Oh, *do* you remember that?" said beautiful Millicent, ardently. "It is one of the most vivid memories of my life. I remember, too, that you were the only person who seemed to understand

my feeling, and how passionately grateful I was to you for it. I remember distinctly how you looked in knickerbockers and long, thin, black-stockinged legs, and a stiff white collar turned down outside your jacket."

"And you!" exclaimed Struan: "you wore all-over white pinafores and what was called a 'round comb,' which was continually getting awry because of the impetuosity of your movements."

"Ah," she said gravely, "surely you and I are not that boy and girl! I often wonder in what respect we are the same as our childish selves. Scientists tell us that our bodies are completely changed every seven years; and, certainly, our minds and our consciousness are in no way the same. With body, soul, and spirit utterly different, there can be no identity except what memory gives."

"There you are wrong, I think," said Struan, eagerly. "Identity is a subtler and stronger thing than any of these, and we are the essential evolution of that identical self. I am absolutely certain that you to-day are the true development of that little girl whose heart ached so to separate the mated birds. That self is the same, in an expanded and matured form, which would influence you now."

“Ah, yes! perhaps so,” she said with a little sigh; and then she caught sight of some object in the distance that made her start, looking suddenly excited.

“I think,” she said eagerly, “that I recognize some one I have not seen for years,—some one I am most anxious to see again. Oh, it is!” And she walked hastily across the room toward a richly dressed woman with a dark, cold face, who stood looking up at a picture.

At the sound of some words from Millicent, she turned.

Struan and Leonard, watching them, saw Millicent take both her hands and hold them, while the two women looked into each other’s eyes, talking earnestly. Millicent’s face was full of an absorbed purpose. The face of the other woman expressed wonder more than any warmer feeling. In a moment Millicent took leave of her companion with an affectionate smile, which the other returned in a half-doubting way.

When Millicent rejoined them, her manner seemed a little preoccupied, as if from her late interview; and nothing more pressing seemed to present itself than to walk around and look at the pictures.

Presently Struan spoke to her of her head of

Leonard, and his enthusiasm gave her an evident delight that he thought argued a somewhat extraordinary humility.

"Do you really like it so much?" she said in her rich, low-toned voice, which differed from some of the voices around them as the sound of whispering leaves differs from the croaking of a tree-frog near by. "Oh, I *should* like you to like my work! And I *should* like, if you could spare the time, to do a head of you!"

"Spare the time? I should rather think so! Only it will have to be after the musical festival is over. You have not heard of that scheme of mine, perhaps, though you knew—did you not?—that I was a professional musician."

"Ask Leonard about that. He will tell you with what pride I have followed your career. You've been very brave to hold out as you have. I've watched for many years to see if you would give up and own yourself conquered. It's been help and strength to me that you did not."

"You should have given me the help and strength of knowing that you watched and cared," said Struan.

"As if you needed help from any!" she said with a gently mocking smile.

And, in truth, her feeling about Struan was

pre-eminent, for the very reason that she felt him so strong in himself as not to need the helps that other men required, when, in point of fact, perhaps no man she knew was as dependent as this one on a certain kind of help—that which the manly asks of the womanly.

He did not answer her in words, but there was a denial in his look.

Presently he said :

“It seems rather strange that, in my various visits to Europe, I have always missed you. How long is it since you were in America?”

“Twenty years; and then *I* missed *you*.”

Struan smiled.

“It seems impossible, when one looks at you, that you can say ‘twenty years’ so lightly,” he said.

“Sometimes I say it rather heavily. It seems a long, long while since I was young—in the way Len is young, I mean; for in some things my feelings seem to freshen. You remember, perhaps, that there is a difference of just three years in our ages.”

“You are really forty?” said Struan, half unbelievably.

“Yes, really forty,” she answered, “and not at all sorry to be so. I don’t care much for youth.

I make the one exception of Leonard, and I think it is because he has so much unyouthfulness in him that I find him so congenial. The quality of youth is pleasing to me, as a rule, only in children. Grown-up young folks possess it so much more imperfectly; and, at the same time, they lack the strong charm of experience and maturity. Given an inexperienced, unthinking human being, I certainly prefer it in the form of a child."

While she spoke, Struan looked at her thoughtfully. Her face had undoubtedly lost something, both in color and outline, of the charm of mere youth; but her skin had the purity of perfect health, and time had done its work on the features with a gracious, even a glorifying, hand. She could not possibly have been so beautiful at twenty as she was now—at least, not to eyes that saw beauty as did Struan's. And with Leonard it was just the same. It was the thought and feeling and experience which the boy had found in Millicent's face which had given him his fine scorn of the most blooming bud that the ranks of society had made known to him.

A little later, Millicent's attention being claimed by some acquaintances, Struan and Leonard had an opportunity to speak of her. Some of the crowd that passed commented upon the absorbed

talk of the father and son. Could that talk have been overheard it might have caused some comment that here, in this nineteenth-century time and place, were two men of far different ages who spoke with an admiration that was in great part reverence of a modern woman who wore fashionable clothes, lived in the thick of the world, not claiming any apartness from it, and yet so lived as to have inspired in these two modern men the same impulse to do great deeds and live great lives as the ladies of old had inspired in their knights. The tasks were greater because the conditions were more difficult, but the mind and heart of the woman were well adjusted to them.

XVII

IN the deepening sweetness of the mild spring afternoon Struan found himself seated at Millicent's side in the carriage which was to take them back to Mrs. Milner's. It was a victoria; and Leonard, who had come in with Millicent, insisted on giving his seat to his father, and going out by train. It was a drive of eight or nine miles; and, under the conduct of Mrs. Milner's old coachman and his fat horses, there was the prospect of a long talk. Struan had made his arrangement to spend the night, and go into town by an early train next morning.

During their drive through town they were more or less engrossed in bowing to acquaintances and in discussing the pictures they had seen; but, when they were on the country road, Millicent, with a change of tone, said abruptly:

"Did you notice that handsome woman whom I spoke to at the gallery?"

Struan answered that he had.

"Do you know anything of her? Had you ever seen her before?"

"Nothing whatever. Never," he said, answering both questions.

“I am deeply interested to know what her life is now,” said Millicent, “or, rather, what her heart and soul are. I fear I know all too well about her life.” She paused a moment, and then, in answer to Struan’s look of interest, went on: “I knew her very well as a young girl. Circumstances threw us together, and she impulsively took me into her confidence. She was a foreigner, with a reckless, intriguing, card-playing father, a spendthrift nobleman, who did not hesitate to throw her into positions of great danger. At last he died, and she wanted to go on the stage. I tried to hold her back, for I knew the life would only add to the dangers of her position. She went off to study for the stage, however; and I did what I could to introduce her to people who would hold her up to her best, and for a while her letters to me were most satisfactory. Then came months of silence, and all my letters remained unanswered. At last she wrote me not to trouble myself any more about her, as she was unworthy of my confidence and affection, and preferred neither to write nor hear from me again. She returned the money I had lent her, and said she was going away, and that letters would not be forwarded. She ended by saying that, the sooner I put her out of my mind, the better it would be for me. I could not

do this, but my inquiries only resulted in some vague rumors of her having been seen in New York under circumstances which confirmed my fears. I have always clung to the belief, however, that I should see and talk to her again. What hurt me most was her belief that I would give her up when I knew what she had done. There was much good in her, and I have often suffered at the thought of how unendurable she must find the life she had gone into."

"Have you any reason to suppose that she has abandoned that way of living?" Struan asked.

"Ah, no! I wish I had," said Millicent, sadly.

"But, Millicent," he said with a sort of breathless eagerness, "when you stood talking to her and holding her hands to-day, did you realize that she might be well known in New York, that you had friends present in whose eyes you might be compromising yourself seriously?"

"And do you think that for that, for the sake of such people as those who would condemn me for that act, I would have kept away from that poor woman, with her unhappy face, whom I might perhaps help? My one chance of changing her is to treat her with affection and respect. Whatever her life may be, there is something in her still which deserves this from me,—if not in

her, in myself. I have taken her address, and am going to see her to-morrow. Perhaps I can reclaim her. At least, I can give her sympathy and love. And so you thought," she went on, looking at him with a sad surprise, "that I would let go this long-wished-for chance of helping her, for the sake of not compromising myself in the eyes of society, some of the members of which are probably responsible for her being what she is! Is it possible that you, Leonard's father, thought that of me?"

"No, not of you, Millicent,—not of you! But—do you know it?—absolutely and without exception of every other woman of your class that I have known! Imagine, then, what it must be to me, on the long way of life, to have come to you at last. We have met late, but I will not say too late. Half my working, striving, doing life is ahead of me yet, in all likelihood; and the knowledge that you exist in the world will strengthen me for it. Thank God, you have come to Leonard in full time! He will have no wasted, weakened years to look back upon, as I have. You will be my helper, Millicent, in making that glorious boy the man I might have been."

Millicent did not answer at once. Presently she said:

“To help Len is one of the things that I live for, but whether he has it in him to become the man you are remains to be seen. I must say this to you, Lucien, to be honest. Don’t think I flatter you. You’ve had enough flattery to know that this is not. Let me speak to you freely once, and tell you that, even before my wish to be of help and comfort to Len, comes the thought of you. Until I saw you, though, I never ventured to hope I could be anything to you.”

“You shall see whether you can or not!” he said as they reached the entrance to the grounds; and, after a moment of silence between them, the carriage drew up at the door.

Leonard, who was watching for them, ran eagerly down the steps to help his dear lady to alight. As her slim foot touched the ground, he thought with envy of Sir Walter Raleigh, and regretted, as Millicent had often caused him to regret before, that the age of chivalry was past. He felt, however, that it still existed in the hearts of men, so long, at least, as Millicent was in the world.

That evening the three friends — Millicent, Struan, and Leonard — had a wonderful talk, lasting far into the night. The old grandmother, who let nothing interfere with her early hours, went to bed. Surely, that pretty, quaint, old-fashioned

drawing-room had not often looked upon such people or such talk as this. The trio seemed to realize that ideal of friendship which, as some writer has said, "consists in much agreement, much disagreement, and an affection greater than either."

They discussed the points on which they disagreed, Leonard giving his opinions as freely as his elders. There was much joy in finding that there were some subjects they all agreed upon, though some of these were the very ones as to which the world about them protested.

Millicent had a power of doing away with superficial conventions that was a marvellous help to the touching of minds and meeting of spirits. There was almost no topic which, treated with delicacy, was forbidden to her; and she had a free and natural way of touching upon and even looking deep into subjects generally supposed to be, though in reality not beyond, the range of woman's conjecture or contemplation. She called Struan by his first name as simply as though they had been still childish playmates. She could not have known how pleasing this was to him, and still less did it occur to her that no woman dear to him had done it since his childhood. He had had no sisters. Leonard's mother had always addressed him

as "Mr. Struan"; and with men, as well as with Jenny, the surname which he had made distinguished was generally applied to him.

When the two men had said good-night, and were having a few final words together in their rooms, Struan said :

"She gives me a certain feeling which I have had from but one source in my life before. I had it first when gazing at the thrilling, uplifting figure of the Winged Victory in the Louvre, a great woman-creature striding forward, invincibly, through the trammels and barriers of life, opening a way for poor humanity to walk in, while all the time her splendid wings are spread as if to lift her to her natural sphere, a higher element which the resting of her feet on earth makes possible for other beings to attain to also."

"Ah, yes! Millicent is just like that," said Leonard. "And there is a poem of Matthew Arnold's called 'Urania' that is her very self. Listen :

"She smiles and smiles, and will not sigh,
While we for hopeless passion die.
Yet she could love, those eyes declare,
Were but men nobler than they are."

"Beautiful!" said Struan. "Well, Leonard, my boy, when I think that this is the being out of

all the world whom you've chosen for your friend, I honor you ; and, when I see that you have won her affection and friendship, I honor you more. Life seems the better because she lives, and humanity the higher because she is human. Good-night, my son ; and God bless you and her."

XVIII

IT was an exceptionally busy time with Struan; and, on reaching his office next morning, he plunged into hard work. This work was of so absorbing a nature that it occupied every faculty of mind and body.

Leonard had accepted an invitation to spend several days with Mrs. Milner, so in the late afternoon Struan took the train for home alone.

It was only when he was whirling along, his eyes fixed on the moving landscape outside, that he could deliberately give himself up to the thought aroused in him by this meeting with Millicent.

Truly, these thoughts were inspiring ones. In spite of all it was a delight to live. The relations of men and women seemed to him ennobled and beautified inexpressibly by his knowledge and recognition of Millicent. The opportunities of life seemed magnificent. He was glad to be part of a system which included such possibilities.

He thought, with a great tenderness, of Jenny, but he no longer deceived himself. He was not angry or even discontented with her. He recognized the fact that one must not expect to get out

of people what is not in them, and he had only himself to blame.

His own life — it was best to face the fact squarely — had been permanently crippled and saddened by his own act twice committed. What a coward he had been, what a weakling, not to wait for the best, the complete! And what patience and courage had Millicent shown! What a power of renunciation and power of hope at once!

He knew that it had cost Millicent something to forego the temporary consolation which would have come from a compromise in love. He honored her deeply for the clear vision that had enabled her to keep her mind fixed on the end. That vision must have warned her, as it had many a time warned him, that misery must be the result of compromise. She had been strong enough to put down the demands of soul and sense as enemies that must be crushed, but he had not. He had let them master him, and had accepted miserably less than he had dreamed. The self-abasement which he suffered now seemed to him only a reasonable punishment. He had caught sight over an impregnable wall of a garden of delight into which he might not enter,—no, not so much as to set his foot upon it; and the one worthy impulse which his heart felt now was to live faithfully the half-life which remained to him.

Prompted by an impulse of renewed affection and kindness for Jenny, he had stopped on his way to the train, and bought her a dainty jewelled comb for her hair. For some reason, all his demonstrations of fondness for Jenny now took the form of presents, probably because it was in this way that he was surest of pleasing her.

When he reached the house, full of his revitalized purpose to be good and loving to Jenny, he found her bending over the table, writing a letter. She looked up at his entrance, and said animatedly :

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come ! I'm writing this because I felt so impatient ; but, of course, I meant to consult you before feeling that the matter was decided."

"What is it ?" said Struan, taking her upturned chin in the hollow of his hand, and looking down at her with a grave kindness that had something inscrutable in it, which she was too self-absorbed to notice. Endearments and caresses were somewhat rare between them now, and the approaches always came from Struan's side ; for one of the surprises of his marriage was that Jenny was unaffectionate, in spite of all her fiery feeling.

"Why, of course," began Jenny, a little confusedly, "it's pretty sudden, and all that ; but it's

such a splendid chance to go with Ida. She's going West to visit some relatives; and, as I haven't seen them all at home for so long, I thought — O Struan, I do' hope you'll be willing for me to go with her!"

She spoke with an eagerness which made him think with compunction of her loneliness, so he said at once :

"Of course there's no reason why you shouldn't go if you want to. You must need a change, poor little dear! How soon should you want to leave? Directly after the musical festival?"

Jenny looked a little disconcerted.

"Why, as soon as I could," she said. "The fact is, if I am going to take advantage of this splendid chance to go with Ida, I should have to go before the festival; for Ida can't wait a day later than Thursday. I'd like to hear the festival, of course, and see what success you have; but, really, it's so certain to succeed that I wouldn't be bothered at all as to that, and you know the music *is* too classical for me. I'd have to do a lot of pretending to make believe I enjoyed it. If you really wouldn't mind, I'd like to start with Ida on Thursday. I thought about begging her to wait for me till after the festival, but it would put her out too much. We have been talking it over this

afternoon, and I was only waiting to see what you would say. I promised to run over and tell her what we decided."

"Oh, tell her you'll go, by all means," said Struan. "As you say, the festival's all right; and you needn't bother about that. I don't see the least reason why you should not go on Thursday if you want to. You might run across now, and tell Ida. I know you are both eager to have it settled. Here's something pretty for you to take with you to show her."

He took the little pink satin box from his pocket, and gave it to her. She opened it with eagerness; and, when she saw the jewelled comb, she gave him a rough little hug, and said he was a perfect old dear. Then she darted through the low window, and down the gravelled walk, running like a child.

Struan stood and watched her. Ida was on her porch; and, as soon as Jenny caught sight of her there, she waved her little handkerchief high above her head in triumphant glee.

He felt bitter in his heart. He was not only willing, but determined to sacrifice his future to this childish creature; but there was something in it all that made the sacrifice seem useless. He told himself that it was only natural that she

should wish to go to her old home, and to have a little variety in her dull life. Yet, natural as it was, it hurt him to see her eagerness to leave him, her lack of interest in his festival, and her frank distaste of the music which was almost a religion with him. He felt a deep apprehension that the difference in their tastes, as well as their ages, would constitute a barrier which time would only widen. Jenny's interests and mental pursuits were the toys of his childhood. It was not to be wondered at if his seemed to her the dull resources of age. A mood of deep sadness oppressed him, the heaviest part of it being his fear that he should not be able to make Jenny happy. If this should be so, what compensation was there for the sacrifices of his life? What atonement could he make for the wrongs done to himself and to others?

How suddenly things had changed for him! Last night he had felt, in body and in mind, a youthfulness and vigor stronger than any feeling of his early years. To-night he felt crippled, saddened, old. It was the effect of being with Millicent, in one instance, and being with Jenny in the other. He did not say it or think it, but so it was.

When the moment of parting with Jenny came, Struan found himself profoundly moved. To ful-

fil to the letter every detail of his obligation to his young wife was now the strongest demand which he felt upon his life.

This man's need of affection was so great that, had Jenny given it to him abundantly and freely, it would have gone far toward compensating for her failure in other ways. But Jenny was not by nature either tender or affectionate. She was ardent, passionate, strong, and brave; but she had little in her composition of what is called the womanly. Struan, on the contrary, had much of it in his.

Up to the very last moment she was bustling about her preparations, and dividing her attentions equally between a lunch-basket filled with dainty food and a dressing-bag filled with dainty implements. The last had been a present from Struan, and the sight of it had moved her more than his parting kiss.

Never had Struan felt the void in his life greater than when Jenny left him alone, but never had he felt more determined to do faithfully the work which his impaired powers left still possible to him. Many a man before him, he told himself, having lost his right arm, had trained and developed the left one to do the work of two. So strong was he in the conviction that it is not good

for man to live alone that he believed it not possible for man so living to be man complete. And to him the loneliness that came from lack of sympathy in mind and soul was far deeper than mere bodily loneliness.

When it became known that Jenny had gone West to visit her relatives, Mrs. Milner insisted that Struan should join the party at her house. Her invitations to Jenny had always been declined. So the day before the beginning of the musical festival, Struan established himself at the sweet old country place, Millicent and Leonard being the only other guests.

XIX

IT was a noble band of music-makers which Struan's labors had got together for the festival; and at the opening performance the great music hall, so associated with his early acquaintance with Jenny, was filled by an appreciative audience.

A special box had been set apart for Millicent and Leonard; and, as Struan came out and took his place on the director's stand, he glanced toward it. The glance was grave and swift, for he was necessarily preoccupied by the importance and responsibility of the moment; but it was enough to stimulate his spirit and fortify his heart.

As for Millicent and Leonard, their pulses leaped. They were in absolute sympathy at this moment; and to be seated there together, feeling, in company with the thousands around them, the thrill of a vast and deep emotion of pleasure which had its source in the being so dear to them, was an almost perfect joy.

As Struan's arm swayed gently, and by movements of his head and eyes he controlled that mighty rush of sound,—violins, bass-violis, drums,

organ, and a score more of instruments,—all sounding or silent at his bidding, he seemed the life at the centre of that great harmony; and each of these three beings—Millicent, Leonard, and Struan—felt themselves one of a threefold cord, not to be easily broken.

Far from feeling apart from Struan, as poor little Jenny had done, Millicent and Leonard had a feeling of intimate nearness to him, a certainty of kinship which made them feel apart from the great audience, because they were one with him.

When the morning performance was over, and Struan, in the midst of a tumult of enthusiasm from the audience, came to the box to fetch his son and his cousin, they were three very happy beings, although each was conscious that the vigorous root of joy in their hearts was planted in pain. But perhaps, for that very reason, the present hour was the sweeter.

All the way through the lobbies, down the steps, and even as they drove along Fifth Avenue in their open carriage, people at right and left were waving, bowing, and smiling their greetings to Struan in ardent tribute to his now certain success.

And Struan, with Millicent at his side and Leonard opposite, looked, as he was, a glowing,

genial, happy-hearted man, with the very fire of inspiration in his face.

Long ago these three friends and comrades had made their plans for the spending of this day. They agreed, before the receipt of the invitations from friends which afterward came, that they would each bind themselves by a positive engagement with the other two to lunch together at Delmonico's.

They were a noticeable trio as they entered and took their places at the small table which Struan had reserved. Any one of the three would have attracted attention, and rewarded it. Struan, exhilarated by his recent triumph and his present companionship, was looking nobly impressive as he bowed here and there to acquaintances in the crowd, through which a little murmur of excitement had passed when the hero of the hour was recognized. Then came Millicent, distinguished and beautiful, in the smartest of her French spring toilets, making no effort to disguise, by a conventional composure, the expression of the ardor in her heart. Then followed Leonard, tall, straight-limbed, clear-featured, his face ruddy, his eyes sparkling with the physical and spiritual well-being of youthful impulsiveness and strength.

When they reached the table to which the

waiter conducted them, paying Struan compliments in felicitous French as he went along, they found it profusely decorated with roses. Struan said there must be some mistake; but the man protested, with more compliments, that they had been sent by some unknown friends who had learned that he was to take his luncheon there.

Struan was not a man to resent as familiarity an expression of good will from any being alive, and so he responded cordially to the man's felicitations as the party took their seats. He placed himself opposite Millicent, who had quietly taken note of the fact that every man and woman in the room, with a greater or less indifference to appearances, was trying to get sight of their party. Struan, looking at her with his smile, which, when free from care, had a peculiar radiance in it, said in a low tone:

"I see one or two dear old fellows who are longing to come and shake my hand, but are intimidated by the sight of you. Would you mind it? Would you let me introduce them to you, or are you afraid of its making you conspicuous? They are all more or less Bohemians, and somewhat unaccountable in their talk, especially when their souls are full of music; but they're —"

“Oh, *don't* make excuses for your friends to me,” said Millicent. “The sooner you find out how unconventional I am, the better. You don't dream of the lengths of it yet. I feel almost irresistibly impelled to wring the hand of that dear waiter who said such pretty things to you, and to scatter handfuls of rose-leaves over him.”

A moment later a tall, stoop-shouldered old man, with scraggy features, bald head, and piercingly brilliant eyes, came over to them in response to a nod of encouragement from Struan, and, as the latter rose to meet him, threw his arms in foreign fashion round him, and gave him a cordial hug, at the same time pouring out enthusiastic congratulations in a French which had a foreign accent.

Millicent recognized this accent; and, when Struan introduced the old man to Leonard and herself, she addressed him cordially in Italian. How his face glowed! With delighted hurry he began to talk to her, while Struan turned to welcome some one else.

In this way ten or fifteen strangers were introduced to Millicent; and, by twos and threes, they lingered to talk. Certainly, this elegant woman, with her *grande dame* appearance and delicate purity of accent, showed herself as easy and com-

panionable to this set of artists, actors, musicians, as she had ever been in her life. Struan was astonished and greatly delighted. Her freedom from false scruples was a bewitching trait in her, which he saw now for the first time. He remembered how his first wife had declined to know these professional friends of his, and how cold and stiff her manner had always been, if forced into even the most casual contact with them. Jenny, it is true, was different ; but, then, poor little Jenny,—how out of her sphere she would have felt herself with Millicent ! The certainty of that fact had caused him to humor her in her disinclination to meet Millicent.

When their friends had considerably left them to eat their lunch, Millicent, drawing the long gloves off her firmly moulded hands, said gayly :

“All things have their compensations, have they not ? When I think that I have passed the time that I need to be protected by a chaperon, it makes up for many of the frivolous delights of youth. How a severe and proper elderly lady would be in our way to-day ! I don’t want to discourage Len ; but I think, on the whole, I prefer the advantages of maturity and advancing life to those of youth. You needn’t mind it, Len, however ; for you have our pleasures to look for-

ward to, while we, alas ! have yours to look back upon."

"Do you know," said Struan, looking across the table at her over the glass of wine which he was sipping with enjoyment, "I can't get over the wonder and delight of finding you so unconventional as you are."

"I told you, Father !" Len exclaimed, half reproachfully, as if it might be thought that he had been remiss.

"But I really failed to take it in. What a companion it makes you, Millicent ! What a power of sympathy it gives !"

"There are two kinds of unconventionality," said Millicent, smiling. "I think the choice as to that is something like the choice between good and evil,—one must know both, in order to make one's choice of one and rejection of the other of any avail. So I think it is well to know both conventionality and unconventionality, and it is the knowledge of both and the choice of the latter which I like. We can all recall instances of people who, having no knowledge of the conventional, riot in a freedom from restraint which makes them the most obnoxious of mortals."

They talked on, going lightly from one topic to another, until the pleasant meal was ended. It

was a delightful hour to them all. The sense of companionship was one source of their pleasure, the success of the festival was another. The good music had exhilarated their souls as the good food and wine had their bodies, and to Millicent and Leonard at least there was a delicious stimulus in the knowledge of the admiring eyes and enthusiastic comments which they knew to be tributes to their companion rather than to themselves. And to Struan, also, every sign of cordiality of feeling was precious.

As they took their way out of the crowded restaurant, the pleasure of the present was so predominating that each of the three had put away, for the time, every trouble they had in the world.

XX

THE musical festival went on to a triumphant close, and ended a success in every sense for Struan. He was a good deal overworked; and he was now to take a week's complete holiday, which he was to spend in the country, at Mrs. Milner's, where Millicent was to do his portrait.

Poor Leonard, for his part, was forced to tear himself away. He was under an engagement to go to see his mother's sister, the aunt who had done what she could to take a mother's place to him in his childhood. Millicent knew this visit was a trial to Len. He did not pretend to anything beyond the affection of gratitude to this aunt, but to that he felt bound to be loyal.

Millicent and Leonard were standing together in Mrs. Milner's drawing-room, saying good-by before their brief separation. She had been looking at him so fixedly for a moment that he asked what she was thinking of.

"I was thinking that my knight is very true and strong," she said, "and that, if he likes, he

may kiss his lady's hand before he goes forth to this noble deed."

"Ah, Millicent!" he cried, tumbling down on his knees before her, and covering both her hands with kisses, in a sudden rapture of emotion. "You must live to see me do something really worthy. I long to have you set me some great task, that I may start out, if it took years of my life, and do it."

Millicent bent for just a second, and brushed his curls lightly with her lips. Then, using all the force of her strong wrists, she pulled him rather suddenly to his feet. From the time that she had first made acquaintance with this ardent boy, and realized the rare sympathy between her nature and his, she had kept her finger on the pulse of his emotions, and had never failed to give them a sudden check when she saw that there was danger of his crossing the limit which she had set for their relations to each other.

The next morning the sittings for the portrait began. Millicent, who had few resources in her present life, had amused herself by fitting up an impromptu studio in the top of the house. Here she worked for a part of every day. Of course there were visits to be made and invitations to be accepted; but she had very little inclination to go

into society, and was not sorry that the coming of spring had made social demands upon her comparatively slight.

It was a pretty, quaint old room that she had transformed into an atelier; and, besides all her paints and canvases and artist's properties, there were numberless pretty Eastern stuffs scattered about, and even some of Millicent's gayly colored opera cloaks and gowns. On a table a great collection of photographs were heaped, together with foreign and American novels, magazines, and papers. There was a comfortable old lounge, and some pleasant, restful chairs; and altogether, the room had a look of unusual grace and comfort.

"What a charming place!" said Struan, glancing about him. "I've sat for my portrait several times before, but it's the first time that I ever looked forward to the ordeal with pleasure."

The emotion he spoke of was written very plainly on his face, and Millicent's reflected it. She was moving about with quick and animated motions, and showed by every sign her interest in the work that she had undertaken.

"My fingers tingle to begin," she said. "You shall make yourself perfectly comfy, and take as easy a position as you choose. I am a beautiful

painter to sit to. Every one says I am. I'll let you talk as much as you like."

She ran to a peg on the wall, and took down a large linen apron, streaked and splashed with paint. This she slipped on over her little morning gown, reaching her arms upward to button it at the back of her neck. It was wonderfully transforming, and gave her a look of childishness very unlike her usual self. Then, with movements full of energy, she came back to the table in the centre of the room, took up her palette, and poured over it a thick liquid from a small bottle.

"I must take every precaution to have my colors clean," she said, her utterance obstructed by the fact that she held the cork she had taken from the bottle between her teeth. "This palette is supposed to have been cleaned already, but I can't trust any one for that except myself."

Struan came quickly and offered to help her, protesting about the cork.

"Oh, I love it," she said, as she screwed it back into the bottle with a twist of her strong teeth. "It's my favorite perfume." She had taken up a rag, and was rubbing away with a will at the many-tinted surface of the palette. "Now," she said with satisfaction, "I must lay my colors before I begin to draw, for I get so impatient to

get on. Oh, this *is* delicious!" she exclaimed delightedly. "I'm very happy, do you know?"

She was not looking at him as she spoke, but at the little stream of color which she was squeezing out of a tube on to the palette. As she deposited each gay little dab, and twisted the caps back, throwing one tube after another into her color-box, Struan thought he had never seen a more absorbed face. It was like the absorption of a child before the time of self-consciousness has set in. It was very evident that the work in hand had driven away the thoughts of all else from her mind.

At last the palette was set, and then came the choosing of the brushes. Her concentration on this act was intense also. She picked up and threw down brush after brush, testing them with the tip of her finger to see if they were pliable and free from paint, then holding them up with a scrutinizing frown to see if the hairs were bent or displaced in any way. When she had selected a little bunch, she thrust it through the hole in her palette, and laid the latter gently and carefully on the table.

Then came the choosing of her canvas, which involved a great deal of sighting above and below the level of her hand, held steadily between herself

and her subject, at whom she gazed and squinted, with her head now on this side, now on that, with no more apparent consciousness of his humanity than if they had both been machines.

Next she got her charcoal, and had sharpened two or three bits to her liking, when she discovered that she had no stale bread.

“Ah! I do think that’s hard of Bridget,” she said, with a positively pathetic reproach. “She *knows* I can’t draw without the bread, and she forgets it every time.”

Picking up a tin can that had held turpentine, she went to the open door, and began to beat noisily on the can with her palette-knife.

“That’s my impromptu for a gong,” she explained as she returned. “It has far more effect on Bridget than the tinkle of a silver bell. Here she comes!”

The Irish housemaid now appeared on the scene, panting with haste.

“What is it, Miss Millicent?” she said.

“What is it, Bridget? *What is it?* Why, it’s bread, Bridget. That’s what it is, and that’s what it happens to be pretty much every day. Now, Bridget, hear my words. The next time I begin work here, and don’t find any bread, I’m going to scourge you,—do you understand?”

Bridget vanished with an expression that was a compromise between a grin of amusement and a frown of protest, Millicent looking after her with a smile.

"She'd break her neck to wait on me," she said, "and she tells me all her secrets. Would you believe they're very interesting? But I'm afraid my use of the word 'scourge' has shocked her. I am perfectly sure it would Bonnemaman and that she'd rebuke me for irreverence."

Here Bridget returned with a large loaf of bread.

"Nice, good Bridget," said Millicent, indulgently. "She's brought me enough to sustain me through a famine; and she shan't be scourged a bit, so she shan't." And she gave the broad-faced creature a pat on her freckled face that sent her away beaming.

"How *human* you are!" said Struan, fervently, as he watched her tearing apart her loaf of bread.

"I hope so, at all events," she answered. "I think the way most people treat their servants pretty much leaves the element of humanity out. Mine are always more or less my friends, and I've never had one of them to presume upon it. Eh bien! Posez, monsieur!" she exclaimed, becoming quickly absorbed in her work, as she took up

her bit of charcoal and squinted up her eyes to begin.

“Comme ça — ne bougez pas,” she said delightedly, falling naturally into the jargon of the French ateliers, which had once been familiar to him, also.

She sketched rapidly with sudden bold strokes and quirks, frequent use of the crumbled bread as an eraser, and now and then a little shading, to which she bent lovingly.

After an hour's close application the drawing was done, and she let him come and look at it before she fixed the outline with her fine hair pencil dipped in red ink.

Then, cutting short his really astonished words of praise, she flipped off the shading and the unnecessary details, dusting away with quick flourishes of her linen rag, and leaving at last only the red outline on the canvas.

Then, with a long-drawn, delighted “Ah!” she took up her palette; and, with a second's consciousness of his existence as man independent of model, she gave him a brilliant though hurried smile, and promptly forgot all about him except that he had a head and shoulders.

It was delicious to Struan to watch her mixing her colors. She would mix and dab and slap with

the flat brush on the smooth wooden surface, turning her head and squinting her eyes, making a little pick at a new color and rubbing that in, and then contemplating the result with intense interest.

At last, with a deep indrawn breath and a flourish of her arm in the air, she began to lay her color. She was firmly planted before her easel; and Struan, who had no absorbing work to pre-occupy him, admired the fine pose of her strong figure, with the head flung back and one foot advanced.

The painting went forward in silence. All the time that she was making that intent study of her model, he, in turn, was making as keenly interested a study of her, as conscious as hers was unconscious. He possessed a rare power of keeping absolutely still, and posing in this easy attitude was no effort to him. Indeed, in any circumstances he would have felt inclined to bodily stillness, while his intense activity of mind went on, with the object of it just in front of him. It added to his liberty of gaze and thought that she was so evidently unconscious of him; and he took long draughts of pleasure in looking at her loveliness, and in perceiving with his mental gaze the beauties of mind and soul which he believed to be its complement.

If Millicent was unconscious of him, it was plain that she was equally so of herself. She held a brush between her teeth, which was heavily wet with paint and, when she spoke (apparently into the air), the movements of her lips, with the wooden handle between them, amused Struan so much that he found it hard not to laugh. Her utterance, too, was odd and indistinct; but she remained serenely unaware.

“It really looks as if it would go,” she said, her eyes fixed on the point of her quickly moving brush; or, with a change of tone: “I might have *known* I couldn’t do it. Oh, but that shadow *is* good! not the least bit inky!” and so on, expecting and receiving no response from Struan, who, possessed by a sense of serene content, was content to be both silent and still.

XXI

AT last she paused. Taking the brush from her mouth, she stuck it into the hole in the palette with the other brushes, and laid all on the table.

"That will do for the present," she said. "Want to see?" And, taking the canvas from the easel, she set it on the floor against the table, coming over beside him to look at it from his point of view.

"It's not so *awfully* bad for a beginning," she said, clasping her hands at the top of her head with a stretch of muscular relief, regardless of the fact that this movement lifted her apron, in funnily awkward folds, up to her ears. "When one knows enough to realize how desperately difficult it is to paint a portrait, the wonder is that any one undertakes it. But how splendid and patient you have been! You've posed like an angel. What should you like for a reward?"

She looked him frankly in the eyes, and they both smiled.

"I'm thinking," he said meditatively.

"How does a cigarette strike you?" she said

promptly. "I've got some *treasures*, and I'll take one with you."

Going to a distant table, she pulled open a drawer, and took out a brown paper box, which she opened, displaying the neat, cork-tipped rows within.

While Struan was selecting one, he noticed that her eyes became riveted upon some small object on the table. His eyes followed the direction of hers.

"'Tis the first wasp of summer!" she exclaimed, bending nearer to the table; "and, oh, do look at it! It's making its toilet!"

The insect, all unconscious of the scrutiny it was under, was diligently rubbing together first its fore legs and then its hind legs, after which its wings were caught under its fore legs, and wiped repeatedly with great care. Then followed a performance that drew from Millicent a whispered laugh of delight. Having disposed of the toilet of its body, taken its bath, as it were, it now lowered its two long antennæ, and proceeded to smooth first one and then the other, from the head down, with its fore legs, giving each of them several consecutive strokes, then turning its little heart-shaped head far to one side, and giving about the same number to the other.

"Did you ever see *anything* so fascinating?" exclaimed Millicent, in delight. "Isn't that *exactly* like a woman combing out her long hair? *Isn't* it,—*absolutely*? Look how its head gives when it gets toward the end of the long tress! Oh, it's *too* cunning! I'm sure it's got a little brush in its hand, only it's too small for us to see."

Struan, delighted and amused, waited willingly for her to watch it as long as she chose. But presently it buzzed away; and then she got up, and reached behind to unfasten her apron. Throwing it off, she stood revealed in the loose loveliness of her little gown of dull blue silk. Then, with a long sigh of relief, she threw herself at full length on the old leather lounge, her long body reaching almost from top to bottom of it. Then she reached for the matches, and, lighting a cigarette, began to smoke.

Struan meanwhile had lighted his; and, drawing an arm-chair near the foot of the sofa, he sat down and looked at her.

As their eyes met, penetrating the delicate smoke-atmosphere, she smiled, accompanying the smile with a little sound of low laughter in her throat. Her eyes got long and keen under their lowered lids, between their shadowy lashes, with that wonderful eloquence of gaze which Leonard

had tried to describe. What Struan read in that look was the conscious power to fascinate, controlled by the restraint of a good woman's conscience.

Struan was right in thinking that Millicent was aware of the almost supreme charm which she possessed for men, when she chose to fascinate them. At the present moment she was experiencing a unique delight. She felt that she was in the presence of a man with whom she might let herself go, without needing to look out for the consequences. Here was a man with whom she felt that she could have the most intimate communion of mind and sentiment, and who, she felt certain, was able to take the entire responsibility of the situation, and sure to keep harm out of it. It was something she had never known before, something she had ceased to expect.

She was tired from long standing, and the physical repose of lying on her back on this padded lounge was delicious. The cigarette, too, was restful and soothing; and, as she let two little streams of smoke escape through her nostrils, Struan said suddenly :

“Millicent ! You're inhaling !”

“I know I am,” she answered, smiling. “I love it ; but don't tell Len, for I've never even

allowed him to learn how. Why shouldn't I inhale cigarette smoke if I want to? It's very nice, and not *very* wicked. I think it must be the faint and far suggestion of wickedness that I like as much as the sedative effect. Besides, I don't see why I shouldn't play at being naughty a little if I like. I'm ridiculously good in most things."

Struan smiled.

"You *are* good," he said; "but I can't say I see anything ridiculous in it."

"You would, I fancy, if you knew my life abroad. I'm in the midst of the most dangerous sort of fast living,—decent, conventional, and thoroughly good form. When I see what their enjoyments consist of, what the things are which give the *élan* to their existence, I often think my presence there is a sort of fraud, and that I have no right to arouse reasonable expectations to be so flatly disappointed."

"I delight to think of you in such an atmosphere," said Struan. "People are fond of quoting, 'You can't touch pitch, and not be defiled'; but no one moralizes from the reverse of that, and says, 'You can't touch snow, and not be purified.'"

"Neither saying is strictly true either as figure or reality. We can certainly touch pitch outwardly without being inwardly defiled, and we can

certainly touch snow outwardly without being inwardly purified. So we *can* come in contact with what is bad without being harmed in the least, and in contact with good without being benefited. Everything depends upon the material on which the influence works. For instance, if my friend at the picture exhibition had been the very lowest of her class, how could it have hurt any honest woman to take her hand and be kind to her? On the other side, how does an honest woman's life affect, for instance, the lives of fast French men and women? I can see them shrug their shoulders, throw up hands and eyebrows, and say, 'Figurez-vous!' and that is all."

"Then, Millicent, if you live in a world which you are sure is past helping, you should leave it; for there's a vastly bigger world than that which needs your help."

"I don't say it is past helping,—far from it. I believe any life lived faithfully is helpful, no matter where it is lived. There is always some good ground for the seed to fall in, but always also, I think, some ground which, even from good seed, produces only tares. I live in that world because the person to whom I am nearest and dearest lives there,—my aunt, who loves me like a mother,—and also, I must be candid enough to confess, be-

cause I've got a taste for the high flavor of life. I love the finish and fineness of it; and, more than that, I love the opportunity which it gives of meeting great people,—men and women of commanding powers and achievements. I did not know, until I had the perspective of distance upon it, how delightful that opportunity was. I wish you could come into the life which I lead for a while. Isn't it possible for even one season?"

A shadow crossed Struan's face. When she saw it, her heart rebuked her.

"Let me tell you something," she said. "Do you know I speak only the simple truth when I tell you that I'd give it all up—every possibility offered by that life—for the sake of knowing one such man as you. Even that is too little—for the sake, I can honestly say, of knowing that one such man as you exists in the same world with me."

Under the delightful freedom imparted by her faith in him, she allowed herself to say this with all the ardor that she felt, and to look at him with kindling eyes.

"Strange!" he said. "Your words are sweet, too sweet, Millicent, and past my power to comprehend. We must be related in some wonderful way that we do not understand. How comes it that I could be all that to you? It is not strange

that you are that to me,—a consciousness of a beneficent presence in the midst of evil days, which is of more value to me than anything else, certainly than any mere personal happiness could be. But tell me, won't you," he went on with a sudden changing of the subject, "what was the result of your visit to the acquaintance you met at the picture exhibition?"

"Oh, it was very strange," said Millicent, as if with the release from tension. "It was totally different from anything you might imagine. I went to the address she gave me, so keyed up to take calmly and lovingly any confidences she might make to me, and so determined not to thwart my purpose of helping her by seeming shocked, that I felt quite bewildered when I found that she was safely and securely married to a good man who adores her. He met her living in that hideous life, which he saw she was so much too good for; and he took her out of it, and married her. They have a pretty home, and she is leading a peaceful and protected life. So I did not dare so very much in speaking to her in public, after all!"

"But you didn't know, so you did dare all. I'm not going to let you take away from the beauty of that act, one of the most simply Christ-like I've ever known of. But tell me about this woman. Is she happy?"

Millicent shook her head.

"Who is?" she said. "Can you give me an instance?"

"I am," said Struan, gravely. Then he smiled.

"Ah in that sense, so am I; and so, perhaps, is poor Antoinette!" said she. "I call every man and woman happy who is able to meet life strongly, to accept their own personal share of the sorrow of the world, and to bear hardness without complaint. Any one who looks can see lots harder than his own, and a noble heart will learn from that sight the cowardice of complaining. For my part, I have found that the greatest rebellion comes from those whose unhappiness is negative,—those who complain that happiness, which with them means getting the intense emotional pleasures out of life, is denied them. I can speak with authority," she added after a pause, "as, for years, I had a hard struggle with that feeling,—a thirst for joy, a need of love, which, I told myself, was a beautiful thing, not to be suppressed, but cherished. And this, I still think, was true, provided I did not allow that feeling to be the supreme motive of life."

"Ah, yes!" said Struan, and waited eagerly for her to go on.

"For a while, I did," she said, "and lived in

the excited indulgence of the dream that I was to be blessed and rewarded above other women. Wretched years those were, when all my thoughts were concentrated on 'the miserable aims that end with self,' as my adored George Eliot says. I think she helped me out of that slough of egoism more than any one."

Something in her words, and more still in her looks and tones, moved Struan deeply. But he looked away from her, and did not speak. When, at last, he turned his eyes upon her, he saw that her mood had changed completely.

"I can't paint any more to-day," she said. "The fit is off me, and I am going to indulge my idle feelings. It isn't often I smoke two cigarettes at a time, for I am very moderate in the indulgence of my one vice. Do you light another, so that, if Bonnemaman comes in, I can throw mine away, and you can take the responsibility of the smoke."

"Does she object to your smoking?" said Struan, watching her with pleasure as she poised cigarette and match in her fingers, and whiffed a puff or two, afterward blowing out the match with a long, gentle breath that made the flame dance and flicker along the wood with a little fluttering noise. She was so interested in watching her own performance, with her long eyes lowered,

that she forgot that Struan was watching her. When she looked up and caught his eyes, she smiled.

"That's an old trick of mine from childhood," she said, and added suddenly, "What were you thinking of then?"

Struan had been, in reality, thinking that he was not quite sure that he liked a woman to smoke. Perhaps it was because he had been accustomed to those who did it in an objectionable way. Certainly, Millicent turned the thing to favor and to prettiness.

"I insist on knowing what you are thinking of," she said, delighted to ask the question, because it was one which she would not have ventured to put to most men under these circumstances.

"Ah," he said, "thoughts are flocking thick and fast. One is that perhaps I ought to tell you that the reason for my plunging so irrelevantly into an inquiry for your friend Antoinette was because what you had said just before was almost sweeter than I could bear."

"And why should you not bear sweetness?" she said with a clear look into his eyes. "You have borne hardness, and borne it well. Take care you don't make a mistake in rejecting what is as rightfully your portion. I think you are in danger of doing that, and I warn you."

Struan looked at her fixedly. She seemed to him all loveliness, from the toes of her little slippers to the tips of the fingers laced together above her head.

“What do you conceive to be my danger,—you?” he said deliberately.

“Yes, in a way,” she answered; “but the danger consists in letting me go, not in accepting me. Look at me, Lucien. I am deeply in earnest in what I say. I am a brave woman, perhaps a bold one. I fancy I see that at the present moment you are not so brave as I. Since we have been in this room, if I read you aright, you have had certain misgivings as to the wisdom of continuing our intercourse. I have never had one. The very point in which you see danger is my bulwark of strength. The attraction of our natures, minds, individualities, for each other, is a thing which we feel keenly aware of. What is the ground of this attraction? I am sure that its strongest element is our mutual belief in each other, with all that that word ‘belief’ implies. What is it worth, if we are afraid of one another, if we dare not take the good the gods—no, I will say *God* provides—because we cannot trust each other or ourselves to avoid wrong and foolish consequences? We are neither of us young nor

rash. Our eyes are opened to see good and evil, and we each have a conscience. I am not afraid. Are you?"

"Not of all hell," he answered. "You have scattered to the winds the petty scruples which I am ashamed to own. You have shown me the thing in its true light, and I accept you as the gift of God."

"And so, absolutely so, do I accept you," she said. "You are an answered need in my life. You are the one person to whom I feel I can tell all things that ever I did, the great and the small. Only there seem to be no great ones: all seems small. Even my own endurance, which at times has seemed to me not insignificant, shrinks to nothing when I think what you have borne from various causes in your life. Leonard has told me a great deal, and I know that there is far more than he or I have dreamed."

"My life has been full of mistakes," he said. "My greatest fault has been the lack of patience, and that seems to me a quality that you possess in a remarkable degree."

"If you draw contrasts," said Millicent, "so do I. Sometimes I wonder if this quality which you call patience in me, this power of waiting, will, in the long run, prove to have done good or

harm. I see how eager you are to assure me of the good, but I have come seriously to doubt if you are right. The aim of life, as you and I accept it, being the formation of character, obstacles and hindrances are things to be sought and welcomed. Sometimes it seems a nobler thing to act impulsively, and make mistakes and grow strong in overcoming them, than to be so self-guarded, watchful, and patient as to keep out of harm's way, preserve one's self intact and inviolate, and to have nothing to regret, unless it be that after a while there comes a wondering regret for the absence of regret,—I mean for the deeper, keener, it may be the sadder experiences of life which what we call our mistakes are sure to bring us. As a record of life, the fair unwritten page of inexperience seems to me far less valuable than the scored and blotted sheet that tells of a life of fiery ordeals, temptations, and even falls, if from these one has risen again."

"Your life has not been without temptations," said Struan, with a serious affirmation that made her feel that he saw deep into her nature.

"No, it has not, thank God," she answered earnestly. "And I can think of some which were worth struggling with. My keenest temptation has been marriage. I had such a thirst for the

fulness of life which can come only with marriage and parenthood that, more than once, I came near making a compromise, blinding my eyes and stopping my ears to facts which sight and hearing declared to be positive obstacles to true marriage. I wondered then, as I wonder still, if a positive mistake might not be in this case a more profitable thing in its fruits than a negative prudence. Sometimes I share the opinion that remorse is preferable to regret, if by remorse one means repentance for doing, and by regret sorrow for not doing. As early youth slipped from me, and I began to look at the possibility that I might not marry, I was bewildered to think of what my future was to be. I thought of all the unmarried women I knew, and something very strong in me rebelled at the idea of joining their ranks. But there was a yet stronger rebellion against a marriage which did not fulfil the conditions which my nature and my conscience demanded. Well, I have remained unmarried; and, under these circumstances, I might be allowed some credit for it. It may be so; but, while I do not fully indorse, I understand better than I once did a speech which I once heard a woman make, and thought at the time that it was infamous. She said that her experience had taught her that it was better

for women to marry badly than not at all. As I say, I don't agree with her; but I can see her point of view. Marriage develops more than anything, and it is development that we want most."

"Ah, yes! marriage," cried Struan,— "the true marriage that is of mind and soul as well as body; but never believe that an incomplete and mistaken marriage develops any noble trait except endurance, which may sometimes be noble and sometimes not. I can understand, Millicent, how your life has been starved for want of the highest good and joy that is given to men and women; but you should thank God that you have stood firm, and accepted no compromise. Why has the world gone so wrong, I wonder? It was a very beautiful and perfect order of creation that made men and women for each other; but the low ideal of marriage, in the minds of men chiefly, is at the bottom of all the mischief and misery. This it is that furnishes the explanation of the fact that the superior women, the grand women, the women who should be the mothers of generations of great ones to come, do not marry; and from this source I explain chiefly the degeneracy of the race."

Warmly touched by the ardor of his tones, Millicent rose from the lounge, went to a distant table, and got a small book which she brought

back with her, and stood before Struan, turning the leaves in search of some special thing.

She looked taller than usual in this scant gown, with its long lines crossed by the loose girdle at her waist. Her brown hair was twisted into a rich knot behind, underneath which soft little curls nestled about her lovely *nuque*. Her gown was cut to the edge of the white column of her throat, where it ended in a severe line, without trimming. The fine hands, which showed their form distinctly against the dark blue cover of the book, were without rings or bracelets; and their fairness was accentuated by one or two streaks of paint.

Struan was taking in these details as she stood and turned the pages.

“Ah, here it is!” she exclaimed. “I don’t know who wrote it; but its philosophy appeals to me, and comforts me when things are at their worst.” And she read:

“Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;
I rave no more ’gainst time and fate,
For, lo, my own shall come to me!

“I stay my haste, I make delays.
For what avails this eager pace?
I stand amid the eternal ways,
And what is mine shall know my face.

“The stars come nightly to the sky,
The tidal wave unto the sea ;
Nor time, nor space, nor deep, nor high,
Can keep my own away from me !”

As she finished the lines in her sweet, thrilling voice, and closed the book, they looked into each other's eyes.

Millicent had grown accustomed now to that gaze of insight. He also knew well, by this time, that sprite look through the lashes of her lowered lids.

As she bent that look upon him now, the smile that matched it came to her lips, and the little murmur of laughter in her throat. She knew that she was allowing herself to be dangerously charming, but she knew also that Struan was strong.

It was a strong smile with which he answered her look now. Then, simultaneously, both faces grew grave with an interchange of glances that signified a deep mutual comprehension.

“Yes,” he said, as if answering her thought, “though much is lost to both of us, much is also left.”

“We have ‘our own,’ or shall have it !” she said. “If we fail in everything else, we may succeed in what is the highest,—the making of a character. It is strange that people who fail in

other things — in art, in literature, in business, in love — do not oftener take comfort in that. It seems a beautiful thing that the very highest field of greatness is attainable by all. And not only is a great character higher than a great painter or writer or inventor, or any of those things, but I even think that it is rarer. I don't mean simple goodness and admirableness, more or less tainted with egoism; but I mean the very highest goodness, the best of high thinking and high doing, which, if developed to man's greatest possibility, must, it seems to me, be more thrilling and impressive than any genius which works upon canvas or paper or electricity, or any mere material things. I remember once that I said this to Len when he was much discouraged about his work, and it helped him."

"Bless you!" said Struan, fervently. "Heaven bless you, Millicent, for all the noble thoughts you have put into Len's head,—and into his father's, also!"

To his surprise, he saw Millicent's eyes fill suddenly.

"O Lucien, don't!" she said in a voice that choked a little. "If you knew how it makes me feel, you would not say a thing like that to me. I'm afraid it's mostly talk with me. I've never

done anything worth speaking of; and what I've refrained from doing seems a poor, negative sort of merit. But I can say this, Lucien,—to you,—what I have borne, in doing without love in my life, makes me feel that I know something of endurance. But even this merit, if merit it be, was involuntary. I would have taken it at any cost if I could have got it without injury to others. I am afraid that my endurance has amounted to very little, except that it has been more or less uncomplaining."

XXII

THE next day was Sunday, one of those benign, still days which seem only to belong to an American Sunday in the springtime.

Struan and Millicent on leaving the breakfast table had seated themselves on a broad piazza which overlooked the sloping lawn, now green and downy with the young spring grass. There was a clump of willows some distance off, and the rising sap in their long stems made a gold-colored lattice-work against the clear blue sky.

From time to time the silence was accentuated by some pleasant country noises,—the crowing of a rooster, the lowing of a cow, the tinkle of a sheep-bell.

It was exquisitely serene and sweet, and Struan had just said that he wondered if it might not be a little like the Garden of Eden, when Mrs. Milner came out, and said it was time to get ready for church, and that she was not well enough to go to-day. She followed this announcement with a significant look at Millicent.

“I’ll get ready at once, Bonnemaman,” Milli-

cent said, rising. "Will you go with me, Lucien?"

"With pleasure," said Struan, promptly, feeling a sudden glow at his heart, which he did not quite understand. He was very regardless of the forms of religion himself, but he was deeply Christian in his heart; and poor little Jenny's utter Paganism often smote him.

A little later he came out of his room ready; and Millicent heard him bounding downstairs two steps at a time, with the impetuosity of a boy.

"You need not have been in such haste," she said, as she joined him on the porch in bonnet and gloves. "The church is very near. Bonnemaman built this little church to solve the carriage-on-Sunday problem in her own mind."

"What do you mean?" he said, as he took from her the two small books which she had brought, and went down the steps at her side.

"Well, you see," she said, "Bonnemaman is a great believer in the sacred observance of Sunday, and is one of those Christians who, when you prove to them that the New Testament does not enjoin it, thinks that it ought to, if it doesn't. So she would never use her horses and carriage on Sunday, because she wishes the men to go to

church. What was my surprise, therefore, to find that in Paris her coachman had a standing order to bring round the carriage morning and afternoon on every Sunday! I was at first bewildered by the suggestion that Paris had corrupted my little grandmother. At last something brought about an explanation; and she told me that, much against her preference, she compelled herself to drive to church twice a day, in order to prevent her coachman from going to the *cafés chantants* and other places of the sort on Sunday. That's a positive fact, and she has always been quite unaware that it has a funny side to it."

Struan laughed, but said nothing as he walked along at her side, stirring the sun-warmed box-bushes with his stick and liberating from them their pungent, delicious smell, which flooded the air with its sweetness.

"Oh, how I love that!" said Millicent, sniffing it in. "It's the best of all smells to me. It wakes up every pleasant memory of the past, and creates a host of bright possibilities ahead for me."

"How strange! How extraordinary!" said Struan. "I have precisely the same feeling about it."

"That doesn't seem to me strange, but nat-

ural," said Millicent. "We think and feel very much alike. Why should not the same odors appeal to us? There must be a law that governs these things."

He did not answer; and, after they had walked on in silence for some paces, he said:

"Do you go regularly to church?"

"Pretty regularly," she said. "I go when I feel like it, and don't go when I don't feel like it; but, as I generally feel like it, it isn't such a lax rule as it looks."

"Are you orthodox?" said Struan, smiling and yet grave.

"I am between two stools. Half of my friends, headed by Bonnemaman, think me dangerously daring in theory and lax in practice; while the other half, my aunt and my friends abroad, think me more or less timid and orthodox."

"You are not timid," he said decidedly.

For the rest of the walk they were almost wholly silent. Perhaps each felt the sense of companionship more perfect so.

When they entered the church and went to Mrs. Milner's pew, and Millicent knelt for a moment in silent prayer, Struan knelt also. Whether or not she had any petition to make to

God, he did not know. For himself, he had none. The only utterance of his heart as he knelt there was a deep thanksgiving, just a simple thought of gratitude to have met this woman at last, to have seen and spoken to her, to know that she was in the world.

Perhaps there was no one in the church that day to whom the service made so strong an appeal as to Struan. The very lack of familiarity made the beautiful prayers more affecting to him.

The scriptural lessons also struck the same chords in the hearts of each. Millicent found the places, and offered him part of her book; and he followed the service, feeling that he held her by this sacred bond. Her gloved thumb was on one corner of the little book, and his ungloved thumb on the other.

The service ended with a hymn. Millicent found the place, and he had just begun to read the words, when he heard a voice, low and sweet, singing, as near to him as his heart it seemed :

“Lead, Kindly Light,—amid the encircling gloom,

Lead thou me on.

The night is dark, and I am far from home:

Lead thou me on.

Keep thou my feet. I do not ask to see

The distant scene : one step enough for me.”

When the hymn ended, they knelt for the benediction. The sweetness of that voice, those words, was almost too much. Tears overflowed his eyes, and he was glad to bow his head.

He was a great musician, and Millicent's voice was but a small one. Yet no music he had ever heard had moved his spirit like this.

They walked home in almost total silence. There seemed little need of speech. Now and then they looked at each other, and sometimes smiled, as if in comprehension. There was a divine feeling in their hearts, an acceptance of sorrow as right and beautiful because of the fruit it yielded. Perhaps in that moment neither of them would have exchanged it for joy.

Near the church they met a little child running swiftly to overtake her sister who had gone ahead. The joyousness of the little creature, who was laughing as she ran, stirred Millicent strangely. She caught her up and kissed her ardently, then turned her toward Struan, that he might look at the glad, unclouded face. Then she looked from that little face to Struan's, and her eyes were full of tears. He understood their mute questioning; for, as she put the eager creature down, he said:

"Her unknowingness? Isn't it that that touches you so?"

She nodded briefly, and the lines about her mouth worked a little. She covered her eyes with her hand, but he could see the piteousness of the lower lip caught between her teeth.

"I understand," he said in a strong voice that steadied her; "and, if I look at her and fear, I have only to look at you and I exult. O Millicent, Millicent, 'God's in his heaven, all *is* right with the world!'"

Millicent had recovered her self-control. She could not trust herself to speak, however. She put out her hand impulsively, and he took it a second in both his own. She felt a new strength come into her from that firm grasp; and, as she drew her hand away, she smiled. It was almost a smile of triumph, and there was triumph also in his eyes.

So they reached home at last, full of a strange sweet comfort born of the willing surrender which was in both their hearts. They were tasting of a joy unknown to youth,—the knowledge that the soul's need is a more important thing than the heart's desire. An exquisite contentment possessed them both, in the light of which all things that were were right.

XXIII

THE three inmates of Mrs. Milner's house had each retired for an afternoon rest. Millicent, however, found it impossible to go to sleep; and, after an unrefreshing nap, she lay a long time thinking.

It was impossible that she could long remain on such a heaven-kissing hill as that of her last interview with Struan. The strength of it had passed into her soul, and she knew that she was permanently enriched and fortified by it; but now came back those thoughts of sadness never far away from any of us, and always so ready to respond to the first bidding to enter.

At last she resolved to get up and write to Leonard. There were writing materials in the studio, and she decided to go up there and write her letter.

She stood before the glass and brushed out her thick hair, twisting it into a pretty knot, and getting the effect of back and sides with her hand-glass. Then she slipped on a little gown of dull rose-colored silk, and belted it loosely with her silver girdle. Then, bending very near the glass,

she looked at herself scrutinizingly. She had done this very often to ask herself candidly if she were losing her beauty; but still she could tell herself no. Some sharp pangs she had suffered when she had seen the charm which belongs to mere youth fading and passing, but the beauty which had come with mature womanhood was equal now to its best. She felt very thankful for it. It would have been a pain to feel it otherwise.

The long mirror showed her tall figure complete. As she caught up the train of her gown, preparatory to leaving the room, the sight of her slender feet below the frills of her skirt gave her a distinct pleasure. She cared so intensely for everything that was beautiful that she cherished with gratitude every claim to beauty that she possessed.

All her life Millicent had believed that these things would one day make her dearer to some one who should be supremely dear to her. How old, old, old that cherished idea had grown! Would she be compelled, after all, to confess that it had been foolish?

"I am forty years old," she said to herself as she walked up the steps. "How would I look upon this youthful thirst for love in another woman, if I could see it without prejudice?"

Would I call it preposterous, undignified, silly? Perhaps I should. I have managed to hide it carefully, and I must bury it deeper and deeper still. But, the deeper I put it there, the stronger root does it take, so that I wonder which will die first, it or me. Well," she ended with a sigh, "I'll go and write to Leonard, who is gloriously young and has the world before him. If he makes of his world, however, no more than I have made of mine, I would not care to change places with him."

Treading lightly on her softly slippers, she entered the studio, and closed the door behind her. Just within the threshold she stopped short, catching her breath for fear of making a noise. There before her, his strong body stretched at length upon the lounge, lay Struan, fast asleep.

He seemed very tall, almost as tall as Len; and there was a stronger likeness to his son than she had ever seen in him before.

She crossed the room very softly, resting at each footstep, and sank noiselessly into a padded chair that stood not far from the lounge. There she sat, profoundly still, and looked at him with scrutiny.

His features, utterly off-guard, were sadder than she had ever seen them. The lines in his face

were deeper, and there were more gray hairs in his thick locks than she had noticed before ; but, sleeping or waking, he had a look of power that she had never seen in any other man. She watched the deep, regular breaths ; and she looked at his dark-skinned hands and muscular limbs with a pleasure in his physical strength. His will, his thoughts, his resolutions, she felt to be equally strong. She reflected, with a sort of protest, that there was, perhaps, such a thing as being too strong. This man, it seemed, could not even be tempted. There was, and she knew it, a vein of recklessness in her which sometimes fired her to very wild imaginings ; but she could conceive of no such spirit in the man asleep before her.

As she sat watching his face, a sudden change came over it. She could not see that any feature moved ; but, as when a light from behind will bring out pictures on a screen which have been there unseen before, the spirit within this man irradiated his features with a look of happiness which was as evident to Millicent as were the features themselves.

She leaned nearer to him, wondering and interested. Something, perhaps the fixedness of her gaze, waked him.

As his eyes opened, she looked at him and smiled, with that sprite look in her long eyes.

Her next consciousness was that he had caught her in his arms. Instantly afterward he had released her, and she was sinking back into her chair, watching him as he crossed the room rapidly and stood looking out of the window.

Her heart bounded as she looked at him, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his sack coat, strained hard across his back. The whole figure was erect and tense, as of a man braced to bear.

He stood some moments there intensely still. Then he turned, crossed the room, and stood before her, his manner self-possessed, his eyes serious and candid. The keen, wild light that she had seen in them for that brief instant was quite gone.

"It isn't an apology that I have to make to you, Millicent," he said. "It is an explanation. I had been asleep and dreaming. The dream is responsible. When I opened my eyes and saw you there, I was not fully awake. I was dreaming still when I jumped up from that lounge and until I touched you. Then I waked."

Millicent kept her eyes upon him steadily.

"Tell me your dream," she said.

He met her gaze as steadily for a moment. Then he said,

"I should like to, but I will not."

"You will," she said with low-toned determination, while her eyes held his resolutely.

"You are wrong," he said. "I will not."

Her face softened to the gentlest smile. Eyes and lips smiled together, as she said in the coaxing tone of a child accustomed to being indulged :

"But, Lucien, if I beg, if I beseech, if I implore ? "

"Not even then," he said with a smile. "O Millicent, Millicent, you complete woman ! You shall not compel me to a thing my soul forbids. You would despise me if you could do it. You know the woman power in you ; and you count upon it, as well you may. You will not often find that you overestimate it. In this instance, however, you have not known the counter-power that there is in me. I scarcely knew it myself until two minutes ago. If I had allowed you to compel me to tell you that dream, I should have been master of myself no longer. And master of myself I am."

"And so you shall remain, for all of me, my noble kinsman," she said with an utter change of look and tone. "I have had certain theories about you which I had some interest in testing."

"For instance, whether I was weak or strong ? "

His smile nettled her a little as she answered,

“Not that exactly; but you have more than once suggested the doubt to me as to whether a man might not be, in a certain way, too strong,—that is, might not be so afraid of giving way to feeling that it would amount to cowardice, and would, in the end, crush feeling out, thus making him weak instead of strong.”

“It might. I can see that possibility, but it is a danger that does not exist for me. There is no danger of my being too strong, Millicent. There is some—not very much, I think, but some—of my not being strong enough. And as for crushing feeling out of me, you dear and innocent woman—thing, you don’t know what you are talking about. All my life it has been almost too big for me to hold,—as if a giant lived inside a dwarf, and fought continually for room to move and stretch. As I grow older, I do not find the giant to grow either smaller or weaker: only the dwarf, by constant strain and hardening of the muscles, grows stronger with him, and has never, so far, given him the advantage which he has fought for day or night.”

A certain decided change came over his face as he took a chair and drew it toward Millicent, so that he faced her directly. When he spoke, his voice, too, was different.

“I have been waiting for this opportunity,” he said, “to ask you to listen to me, Millicent, while I tell you, as quickly as I possibly can, one or two things which are needed to give you an insight into my life. I do not want to sadden you; and I hope to give you, with these confidences, something of the strength which has enabled me to bear my not over-fortunate life with a certain degree of courage. I say a man or a woman who possesses the power to bear with courage the hardness of their individual lots is fully as richly endowed by fate as those men and women who have their hearts’ desires in the way of fortune, love, success, fame, or whatever it may be. To me now, as always, love seems the supreme joy; and yet not even for love would I exchange the power to endure which, to some extent at least, is mine. I can imagine that the same life might contain both,—the perfect good of endurance and the perfect joy of love; but, to be complete, the endurance should come first. Men and women would be unworthy to have love who could not do without it, and do without it resolutely and cheerfully. If, as I say, endurance could come first, and, after one had given proof to one’s self and the world of a brave and patient power to endure, love could come then, the humanity that admits

of such a state need make no weak complaints of mortality and sickness and such minor things. Now, since I deliberately make this my choice, since I prefer as my gift from Fate, or Providence, the power to renounce and to endure in a spirit that shall add to the great courage-store of life for those about me and after me to draw upon, I don't make any weak complaining that joy has been denied me. Had I been given the power to choose, I should have taken endurance rather than joy." He paused a moment, and then went on :

"Since I have made my position plain to you, you will not let your kind heart pity me more than it need when I tell you something of the life I have lived outside your knowledge."

He paused. Millicent did not speak ; but he got his answer from her eyes, which were intent with interest and sympathy.

"I married at twenty-three," he said, speaking rapidly as if he were anxious to be through with his task. "You already know something of Leonard's poor mother and her invalid life. It was never a real union at all. We spent a few wretched years trying to reconcile our utterly unreconcilable natures, and then we gave it up. I think she did her best, and that she had some affection for me ; but I saw from the day that I

married her that she was incapable of loving me as a wife should love her husband. Her coldness drove me wild; and for many months the whole universe seemed to be upset, and love above all things seemed a madness and a delusion. Gradually, I found my bearings again, and saw that it was not love and marriage in themselves that were wrong, but only as they existed in my own case. For a long time I staggered on under the weight of a marriage that was a mere pretence; and then I spoke out plainly, and we agreed to live apart. This for many years we did. I believe I did my best for her; and Leonard, who knows all, was satisfied."

"Satisfied?" she said. "Leonard has talked to me freely about it. That word is far too little for what he feels about your course."

"Leonard's judgment is partial," he said; "but I did accept the undeniably hard conditions of my life, with no thought of doing anything but bearing them. I had grown entirely accustomed to endurance, when death made me free. I had, however, no idea of marriage again until within a year conditions arose which caused me to marry suddenly. You have never seen my wife, and I do not know what Leonard may have told you of her. I am anxious that you shall know her

some time, and she you. At present she is visiting relatives in the West."

"Yes, I know. Leonard told me," she said gently.

"She is very young," he went on,— "scarcely more than Leonard's age, and comes of simple country people without importance or position of any kind. She had a pretty voice, and wanted to go on the stage; and she came to New York in order to take some lessons from me. But I discouraged her. I saw that she was not only country-bred and ignorant of the world, but that she had the passionate, wild nature of a little savage, and absolutely no restraints in the way of family influence, conventional usage, or even self-protection. Indeed, it was her freedom and impulsiveness and her purity and honest nature, so marked in contrast to the cold prudishness of the over-civilized women of to-day, that constituted her powerful charm for me. I felt it without knowing that I felt it, until, by some chance, inevitable between two such natures as hers and mine, the fact was revealed to us both; and I found that the feeling existed on her part as well as mine. She had all the fire and nature in her that I had missed so long, and I soon felt that the love which we had betrayed for each other made a demand

upon me which I could only discharge by marrying her. I considered, hesitated, and yielded,—not wholly through weakness. I do not expect others to believe it, but I dare to tell you that I agreed to the marriage as much for her sake as my own. She is a little, youthful, inexperienced creature, who does not often have a serious thought, who is, as she frankly owns, unintellectual, even uneducated, both in mind and manners; but she gave herself to me nobly and generously, in the very flower of her youth and beauty, and for my sake she made the great sacrifice of giving up her stage career,—a thing on which her heart was set.”

When he looked at Millicent, he expected to see on her face some reflection of his own fervor; but she met his eyes a little coldly.

“It speaks badly for women, or rather for your opinion of them,” she said, “that you should be surprised that a woman should willingly make some small sacrifice for love. Besides, what was a stage career to this girl, compared to being the wife of Lucien Struan, even if she had not loved you, as it’s to be supposed she did! And you call that sacrifice! How can women be anything but small and narrow, when they are not believed in?”

When she looked at Struan, as she ended, she saw that he was moved by some inward feeling so strong that it prevented his speaking for a moment. Presently he said :

“ You know very little about me, if you think that I am one of those who disbelieve in woman. That is the deepest and most sacred belief of my life. I will not say that I have kept it always clear and unsullied. But what I will say is that, as often as I have strayed away from it, I have come back, in humiliation for my want of faith. I believe in women in every way. So strong is this belief that, if I thought that voting and holding office would result in the real freedom of women and the grand consummation of the predominance of the woman-spirit in the world, I would fight for their suffrage. The man-spirit has ruled long enough. Its influence has been tested, and the world is a bad world yet. We have waited long enough to see if ‘ out of the strong would come forth sweetness,’ and it has not come. Let us see now if out of the sweet will not come forth strength ! The world has vital need of both. It can do without one as little as without the other. I believe in progressive dispensations ; and, according to that theory, I believe that the world should grow out of the man-spirit upward

to the woman-spirit. If we begin at a point where barbarism makes brute force and physical courage the highest virtues, then, when we shall have progressed upward, let our higher natures have what they demand,—purity, sweetness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, patience, fortitude, meekness—all that is found in what is called ‘the womanly.’ As surely as spirit is higher than flesh, just so surely is woman higher than man. But don’t misunderstand me in this,” he broke off with a sudden energy of protest. “Don’t suppose, when I make this distinction of spirit and flesh, that I put under the latter head that grand spiritual essence of pure human passion. No a thousand times! It is here that I find woman’s greatest mission,—to teach men how to love, to spiritualize and intellectualize their coarser natures, to kill sensuality, and to raise pure passion to its true place and stamp it with the beauty of holiness. If the world is out of joint, it is because the masculine has still the predominance, and because we allow ourselves to be governed by the rule of force, like the savage. But for one influence, which came as the Light of the World, and both by teaching and example leavened the lump with a little of the leaven of the womanly, it seems likely that our race would

have become by this time the merely brutal. It is this that men worship in Christ, as much as his supremacy of intellect and character. Some writer has suggested the idea that it is this — our need of the womanly to worship — which has driven such hosts of human beings into Mariolatry.”

Millicent listened to him, profoundly moved. His face was wonderful. She recalled his having told her once that he always congratulated himself that, in leading an orchestra, he stood with his back to the audience, as, when greatly moved by music or any strong emotion, he felt that his face betrayed too much. She felt that he trusted her, — that he made no effort to wear a mask in her presence; and, as they sat and looked at each other, she knew that it was by his consent that she read his very soul.

Every trace of the coquetry which she had felt a little while ago was now gone, and her mood was as serious as his. A sadness that seemed as if it would overwhelm her had taken possession of her heart.

Silence had fallen between them. It was filled, to each, with a sense of nearness. Millicent sat with her head dropped upon her hand, her elbow on the arm of her chair. Once, and then

again, she looked up, to find his eyes fixed on her with a gaze that made her feel that her heart was bared before him. Struan also had this feeling. He saw no reason to conceal from her the truth about himself. Why should he? She already knew. Her knowledge of him, of his essential *ego*, made clear to her his feelings in the present time of his life.

After a long silence he began again.

“I have a supreme object and desire in my life, and I want your aid to accomplish it. You well understand that it is not my own happiness. You understand, also, I imagine, what it is. Leonard I feel safe about, with your help and watchfulness over him. My work, too,—after the success of the festival,—seems now on a secure basis. My object is to make Jenny happy,—to comfort, brighten, sustain her, to atone for any unconscious wrong I may have done her in making her my wife. If she were”—he paused as if unwilling to utter the word, and then, not finding a better, said —“different (I don’t mean that I wish her changed except in some subtle way that would put us more on a level), the problem would not be so difficult. Ah, Millicent, I often feel that I wronged her youth in marrying her! I want you to see and know her. I have wanted this all

along ; but it seemed best to wait until I could give you some insight into the position in which she is placed, and her attitude and feelings. I did ask her to come with me to call on you, but she frankly refused. She is the soul of honesty ; and she said I might as well recognize the fact that she was not of your sort,—that her intercourse with Len had settled the matter. He has been all that I could wish in his bearing to her, and made every effort to be friendly and familiar ; but that it was an effort she has perceived and resented. She does not blame Len, but she avoids him. His presence gives her a sense of constraint which is most unpleasant and unusual, for she has been accustomed to being first in the society which she has had heretofore. With me she did not have that feeling, because love is the great leveller ; and we truly loved each other. Besides, she is right in a way. You and Len are more of your class than I am. It could not possibly be otherwise. I have been, half my life, mixing with people of all sorts ; and I have no particular class. But, in spite of all this, Millicent, I want you to know my wife. You will be able to overcome this feeling in her, to do away with this barrier. I feel a tremendous hope that you will help us both to a better happiness and mutual comprehension than

we have ever known. She has never seen a woman like you! Ah, my lovely friend and cousin, who has? And if you will care for her a little, if you will sympathize with her and help her, and by your womanly knowledge help me to be to her what she needs, you will be giving me the greatest benefit that I can get from friend or woman. I crave your friendship for my wife, my friend. She has never had such an opportunity as a friendship with you will be. I think she will know how to appreciate it. I think it will show her the contrast with the women who have been her friends until now. How could she help it, poor child! They were the best she ever knew."

"I will do my best," said Millicent. "I will make it, for the present, the object of my life, too, to make her happy, if I can be an instrument to that end. O Lucien, I thank you for showing me this trust. If she will only love me, perhaps I can do much."

Poor Millicent! She said these brave words with a heavy heart. She knew that she would keep the pledge, and do her best; but at the same time she felt come over her a great sense of weariness. How long must she go on helping others to a happiness which no one helped her to, — trying to fill the hearts of others while her own

heart remained empty, to feed the souls of others while hers starved?

She stifled back these feelings, though, and said gently :

“You think she is not happy?”

“She is too brave to tell me so, but I can feel it. If you could see her! She is a child to you and me,—the age of Len in years, and younger far in nature. Often I feel, with a sharp pang, that perhaps a younger man might have made her happy. God knows! I want to find the key to it all, if I can. If she loved books, if she could interest herself in my pursuits, so that I could be more of a companion to her! But she — poor little heart! — had a youth and early training which cut her off from all intellectual study and association, and the taste for it is not there. Millicent, I sometimes fear that the thought that I wronged that generous soul in marrying her will be the sorrow of my future life. I even fear — O God, how good it is to pour into another human heart the sadness and the fears so long shut close in mine!” He was silent a moment, then went on: “I even fear that what I said just now about marrying her as much for her sake as for my own may be a self-deception, for I was a coward when I did it. I was worn out with wanting, with try-

ing to still what was the supreme craving of my nature,—the craving for the human complement of myself. I knew that in this marriage I gave up the idea of intellectual companionship and equality, which could only have been found in a woman whose tastes and ideas were similar to my own. This thought did stand up to be wrestled with, but I put it down with the thought of Jenny's love for me and need of me ; and I knew that, if love and tenderness could make her happy, these should never lack. They never have and never shall, but whether they are enough is the thought that has begun to trouble me now."

Millicent looked at him with a deep and searching sympathy.

"You have not told me any positive reason that you have for believing that she is not satisfied," she said. "Have you any tangible one?"

"A little while ago I should have answered no," he said. "Now I must say yes. I have long felt vaguely that her life was wearisome to her; but since she went away I have had a letter from her, asking if I would seriously object to her carrying out her old idea of going on the stage. I have given her lessons constantly, and she has trained and developed her voice so that she could, with her decidedly pretty face and figure, make

an undoubted success in such a career ; but I did not know she still clung to the idea, and it was a blow to me to find out that she did."

"What did you answer her?"

"I wrote her that she was always free to do as she chose. I have an abhorrence of the marriage which orders and coerces. At the same time I told her that it would grieve me deeply to see her in the environment that I knew so well and that she was so ignorant of; and I begged her to question her own heart, and tell me what her motive was. She has all the money that she wants, and it cannot be that. I ended by making it the appeal of love that she would not leave me, even temporarily, for a life which I should so strongly deprecate and object to for her. I am waiting now for her answer, and I cannot doubt that she will respect my wish and respond to my appeal. When she comes back, I will make a fresh endeavor to give interest and pleasure to her life; and now, with you to help me with a woman's tact and insight, I have a better chance than ever before to succeed."

"I will help you with all my heart and soul," she said in her sweet and thrilling voice. She had got the better of her own selfish longings, and said these words with deep sincerity. "I hope

she will not stay away too long. My aunt has written that she is thinking of a journey to the East; and, if she goes, I am obliged to join her, and go with her. She is not strong in health, and she could not go without me. A telegram might summon me to her at very short notice, so I cannot make any future plans of my own. But, if I can help you in this way, I shall be glad and thankful. I would gladly stay to do it, but my aunt's claim upon me is the one I cannot ignore."

Struan looked at her steadily in the quiet evening light which was beginning to spread its gloom throughout the room.

"I had not thought of your going away so soon," he said. "You seem to have only just risen on the horizon. I find myself unprepared for such a possibility. O Millicent, it is good to have known you," he added with a deep indrawn sigh. "It is good to have looked on such a patient life. I have been impatient in mine, and I am punished. Not only have I failed to realize the magnificent dream of marriage which I once had, but I have a harder consciousness than that to bear about with me. I have stood in the way of the realization of a dream of marriage in another life, which, though different from my ideal, might yet have made the happiness of two other people.

My punishment is right, but it is hard. What I cannot understand, what is so terrible to me, is that she should have to suffer. She was so young and ignorant that I should have judged for her. It was my weakness that kept me from seeing, and yet it was weakness which came from strength, from the mightiness of this need of love that is in my nature. It has been denied and disappointed all my life, but it springs up stronger after each defeat. Never has it been so vigorous and so dominating as it is now, and never has my life seemed more bereft."

Millicent's eyes kindled with a beautiful, tender smile.

"Lucien," she said, "perhaps I can comfort you, dear cousin and dear friend. You blame your lack of patience for what you feel to-day; but I can prove to you, perhaps, that you are wrong in this. You praise the patience of my life, and yet the same unrest and lack are mine. Do you imagine it is any comfort to me to say now: 'At least, my skirts are clean. I have been prudent and wise, and have taken care that no troublesome remorse should mar my self-complacency'? I can assure you there seems no nobleness and no comfort in that to me. I have once or twice been near to a mistaken marriage

myself, but the elements which prevailed with you were lacking with me. You were moved by the fear of paining and depriving another soul. I was egotistical, and considered myself first. I declined to take one atom less than my ideal for fear that afterward it might be my fate to meet with a man who was all I had desired, and to see my mistake too late. Well," she added after a pause, "I have been patient, and waited. I am forty years old; and my life is, as you see it, empty. Not that I am unable to take pleasure in much that comes, and sometimes I can give help to others; and that is not only comfort, but joy. Still, I am certain of this: that there is absolutely no compensation in life for a woman who misses love. There is work and the pleasure that that brings, and there is much enjoyment in gratifying the intellectual tastes. Then, too, there is that grand comfort which comes from the consciousness of power to endure, which we were speaking of just now. All these there are which make life abundantly worth living; but compensation for the lack of love, there is none. I have known it always, and I have been stronger for the knowledge."

Struan did not answer.

"An old maid!" she said with a sudden grimace

and smile. "I wonder why it is that not only the name, but the idea, has something funny in it. It has been said that it takes a superior woman to make an old maid, for almost every woman must have at least one opportunity to escape the obloquy of it. Bless their dear absurd hearts, how I yearn over the entire species! How often I have watched a batch of these dear women pattering about in picture galleries abroad, studying their Baedekers, and airing their smattering of foreign tongues, and trying so bravely to pad out their collapsing lives! And then, again, to see them accentuating the emptiness of a great city church at an early service, where so often I have made one of them, seeking the slaking of soul-thirst, the comfort for loss, the support through trial, which, I believe, women feel more than men! Men are stronger than women, or weaker, I don't know which! They are bolder in getting what they want; but perhaps it is braver to renounce, as women do. Oh, it's all a mystery; and I don't know what to make of it. I only know that there is great comfort in having got to a place in life where one accepts mystery, and one is satisfied to do the best one can, without asking to see anything clearly, except that it is right to be good. I might be asked to define what I mean by right

and good ; but I have a strong conviction that no man or woman need be in doubt about that, if they honestly question their own souls. It must be right to consider others more than ourselves. It must be wrong to take happiness at the cost of pain to others. It must be right to be faithful to our obligations, and wrong to try to shirk their consequences. A few plain leadings such as these all souls are given, and they are enough. And, as for the old maids that I was talking about before I got off on this moralizing track, I have a feeling for them that makes me wish that I could take them all to my heart, and hide their eyes on my breast, so that they might not see the smiles of the world at their expense,—nor my own smile over the tops of their aggregate heads, either !”

As she smiled in reality, Struan said with a reflection of her smile :

“Are you an old maid, Millicent ? There is something ridiculous in the term as applied to you.”

“Yes, isn’t there ? I can see it myself. Oh, dear, how long, I wonder ? Twice forty is eighty. I can’t live to be over eighty, in all conscience. My long journey must be certainly half done.”

“Are you tired of it ?”

“Not usually. At this moment, yes, pro-

foundly. I'd let it go without a qualm just now. Don't let that make you uneasy, however. To-morrow morning I'll probably value it above rubies."

He looked at her fixedly.

"The very fulness of life and love may come to you yet," he said.

"Oh, I can do without it. Never mind me," she said with a light laugh. "I'm not such a weakling that I can't pick up my burden, and trundle along with the procession. You and I, remember, have been given the gift which we both think equal to the best,—the power to endure. I'm not dissatisfied with life, except in weak moments when I choose to let myself give way; and then I always know that I'll come to very soon."

"No, you are brave. I know that; but I can see no reason why, after renunciation, you may not have joy."

Millicent did not answer except by a disbelieving head-shake. She sat silent a moment. Then, noticing that the shadows had deepened in the room, she stood up.

"It will soon be time for Bonnemaman's early Sunday tea," she said. "We must go and get ready for it,"

He rose also ; and they stood facing each other, their eyes penetrating the still gloom.

“Millicent,” he said, “your words this afternoon have comforted my very soul with a comfort far removed from thoughts of self. A strange foreboding overhangs me now,—a sort of dread of more pain to come. You have opened to me a larger view of life beyond my own. You have helped me more than you dream of.”

He held out his hand, and Millicent put hers into it. It was the first time he had touched her hand, except in formal greeting or farewell ; and its brief clasp now was as firm and cheering as that of a friendly boy.

XXIV

SEVERAL days went by, marked chiefly by progress on the picture. Millicent worked hard during the morning hours, but the sittings were usually almost silent. They seemed not to have a great deal to say to each other; and Millicent, at her easel, was always an absorbed worker.

In the afternoons they usually had visitors. Old friends, whom Millicent had known abroad, and new ones, of her grandmother's circle, took to driving out and having tea with them.

Miss Evleth was disposed to show some impatience of these guests, until she found that it gave her an opportunity of watching Struan in his attitude and intercourse with others.

There was no one he could not talk to with an air of interest, no subject he could not illumine; and she allowed herself to yield to the impulse of silence that came to her, as she watched and listened to him. Her reputation as an agreeable talker suffered from it, but nothing was more indifferent to Millicent now than the maintenance of that reputation.

Struan's week of holiday, during which he had not even once gone into town, was nearly over. The portrait, which aimed at being nothing more than an impression, was carried about as far as its author felt that she could go.

One evening, about ten, when Mrs. Milner had gone off to bed, Struan and Millicent were in the drawing-room alone. He had been playing to her, and the candles were lighted on the piano. Otherwise, the large room was in shadow. Struan was still seated on the piano-stool, and Millicent was in a large chair near by, when a servant brought the evening mail, just out from town.

Most of the letters were for Struan, but there was one for Millicent from Leonard. She tore it open eagerly and read it through, while Struan occupied himself with his own letters.

"What a wonderful being Leonard is!" she said presently, with enthusiasm. "How intensely he feels! How loyally he loves! And how wildly he idealizes! Do read this," she added, holding out the letter to him. "Read it aloud. I can stand anything from Len; and that is so sweet, and so like his very self."

Struan read it in his deep-toned voice that always sounded to Millicent as if it were a strain of

music attuned to those orchestral accompaniments that he had so often led.

This was the letter :

Dearest Millicent,—I have been away nearly a week. I'll miss you always just the same; and I am always your own true knight, though so unworthy of your love. How I love you, Millicent! I can only quiver as the ugly duckling quivered when the beautiful, pure swans swam out to greet him. I feel so great and yet so small. Millicent, let me tell you of a thought I had the other day, when I was in one of my moods of black wretchedness that you have so often helped me through. I was passionately praying to God for help (it was in the dead of night), when I seemed to see a great chasm running straight up in a point and reaching heaven. From this a light came leaping down the darkness until it touched the earth at my feet; and a voice said plainly: "You are being tried to see if you are worthy of one talent or of ten. Fight a brave fight, and you have my help."

Of course, dearest, I did not really see and hear this; but the sound was in my ears from somewhere, and the thought was printed on my hot forehead as a kiss is sometimes pressed upon a man's head by some dear and comforting one in the hour of trial. Oh, what happiness it brought to me! It seemed to promise me that God was going to help me to do something great with my life. I must try to remember what you told me about not flooding all the little dykes and meadows, but going back into the real river and flowing straight and strong.

O Millicent, how you have helped me! How I love you!—how I worship you! You are like a blade of pure

steel, so clean, so true, so bright, so trustworthy, and kept in such a tender, lovely tinted silk case that little babies may fondle it and be as free with it as with the hands of their mothers!

"There, that will do," said Millicent, taking the letter back. "That was the part I wanted you to read. To me that boy seems to have something divine in him. I feel that he is to be the greatest comfort of my future life. You will let me have him with me a great deal, won't you, Lucien? You will trust him to me?"

"He is yours, and you are his, by a right too high for me to question," Struan said. "But I can tell you this, in securing you for his friend and guide, he has got what I value for him more than anything else in life. Surely, you well know that."

He spoke with great earnestness; and yet Millicent became aware that he was in some way pre-occupied, and looked excited. She now observed that he had put down on the piano the letter which he had read, and was holding in his hand one that was unopened.

Instantly the thought flashed through her whom it was probably from, and why he had hesitated before opening it.

"I am thirsty," she said. "I will go and get some water, and leave you to read your letter."

He seemed about to protest, but then changed his mind, and said quickly :

“Yes, go if you like ; but promise to come back. I shall want you to know the contents of this letter. It is from my wife.”

Millicent left the room. As she crossed the hall, she looked back, and saw him tear the letter open with an eager decision, at variance with his recent hesitation.

She drank some water from the pitcher in the dining-room ; and then, going over to the window, she stood there, and looked out into the night.

Over the points of two tall evergreens, that rose above a black mass of shrubbery like the steeples of a church, the full moon and one great planet blazed in the clear air. She looked coldly at the still moon, and then, with a quickening of feeling, at the pulsating star. She wondered why she had always loved the stars so much better than the moon. It was almost as if they were persons, and the moon was a thing. Was it because the latter was known to be burnt out, and devoid of life, in its brilliant, cold placidity, while the former might be filled with a vivider life and light than our imaginings could picture,—the life that seemed to quiver in that star yonder, like a restless heart ?

The influence of those radiant lights above or

of that struggling soul across the hall so overwhelmed her with a sudden sadness that she felt an impulse to be completely alone; and she decided to go and say good-night to Struan, and get away as quickly and as quietly as she could.

When she returned to the drawing-room, Struan was still seated on the piano-stool, his body sideways toward the instrument, and his elbow resting on the base of the music-rack, his head on his hand. The other hand lay on his knee, with the open letter in it, which he had finished reading. Millicent saw that his face was pale and his eyes excited.

He turned as she came in, and, sitting tensely upright, said, in a voice which she knew it cost him an effort to control :

“Something has happened, Millicent,—something that is a severe blow to me. You must help me to think what can be done. Read this letter, if you wouldn’t mind.”

He gave her the letter, and then went away to the other end of the room, and stood before the window, looking out, in his turn, at the moon and the star.

But he had not even the consciousness that he saw them, in the keen preoccupation of his thoughts.

Millicent, meanwhile, was reading the letter.

The handwriting in itself was a shock to her. It was the round, unformed, uncertain hand of a child. The very paper had a significance of its own. The letter ran thus :

Dear Struan,—I know you will be awfully surprised, and I'm afraid you'll be mad, too, when you hear what I have done ; but it's done for certain, and I hope you'll save yourself and me a lot of useless trouble, and not make a fuss about it when it's too late to do any good. The opportunity of my life has come to me here, and I was not going to be such an idiot as not to take advantage of it. Now don't be mad, and I'll tell you all about it. Ida was going to San Francisco, and I decided to go with her for a little lark ; and, as I was there (or rather here), I thought it would do no harm to consult a big manager, I happened to meet, about my voice. I told him I was only considering the matter about going on the stage, and might never do it ; but he was perfectly lovely, and said he would try my voice at once. I think it was my telling him that I was a pupil of yours that made him take an interest, though he told Ida before that that I was "a daisy from daisy-land." Of course, you'll think this a vulgar expression ; and I'm not telling it out of vanity, only you know how important looks are to a singer.

Well, I never *hinted* that you were anything more to me than my teacher ; and Ida has kept the secret faithfully. He didn't ask any troublesome questions, as I was afraid he might, though you know you can trust my wits. The upshot was that he heard me sing, and made me a rattling

good offer. I *had* to take it at once, or let it be given to some one else, which would have broken my heart. Ida said you'd get reconciled when the thing was done and over,—that men might talk forever, but they always came round in the end.

Well, I signed the contract, learned my part, and I've sung two nights. I tried to write you sooner, but you know what a mad rush I've been in. I had not only to study my part, but also to get my costumes, which are *stunning*. Besides, I wanted to let you know that I was really a success. When you read the notices I enclose, I hope they may reconcile you. Now do be reasonable, and write me a nice letter. This engagement is only for five weeks, and I need not make another until we have talked it over. But, honestly, you ought not to try to keep me from what makes me so happy. I don't interfere with you, and you oughtn't to interfere with me. I tell you frankly that your friends are not my sort. They wouldn't like me any better than I'd like them. *Please* don't think of coming to see me. It would only upset me. You ought to be satisfied, as you've always said you cared so much for me to be happy; and I'm in such a state of bliss now that I can hardly sleep for joy. You will see by the cuttings I enclose that I've got a new name, so no one will know who I am. If you could send me a telegram to say it's all right, I think I should like that better than a letter, because, if you wrote, you might try to change my mind; and you'd only bother and distress me. Cheer up now, and go about among your friends, and be happy. I'm sure I don't grudge you any pleasure that you care for, and you oughtn't to grudge me. You ought to be satisfied to know how happy I am,

Yours lovingly,

JENNY.

Millicent folded the letter, and replaced it in its envelope. As she did so, she caught sight of several newspaper clippings on the floor. Plainly, they had not even been read.

Looking across the room, she saw him standing with his hands in his pockets, the curtains pushed aside by his elbows, and looking out into the night. Her heart swelled with pity for him. She called his name, and he turned and came toward her. His face looked haggard and almost old.

"Lucien," she said, as he placed himself again on the piano-stool, "this is very bitter to you. I know it. I will not be so foolish as to make light of it. But what will you do about it, dear? How can I help you? I am trying to think. Will you make any effort to stop her?"

"Certainly not. Authority seems to me the last and lowest appeal between man and wife. If my wish was not enough, there is nothing more to be said. Neither shall I go to see her, since she objects to it. What I must do immediately is to see that she has some friend, some older woman, to be with her all the time, a woman capable of taking care of her health and looking after her conduct, too. If she errs in that, it will be through ignorance; but she is heedless and impulsive, and doesn't know what it is necessary

for her to do and not to do. I could never have dreamed that this would happen. I ought not to have married that young creature, whose youthful ardor I took for a real and enduring devotion. I ought not to have silenced the inward monition which told me I was making another mistake. My own share of pain I can bear; but to have for the second time involved another in such a misfortune is hard—almost too hard. I must, at all costs, guard that young being who so freely trusted me. I will go to town early to-morrow, and see what can be done.”

Millicent sat silent for some moments. Then:

“O Lucien,” she said wistfully, “if I could only use up all the capacity that is in me by giving you some real help now! If I could only be freed, at a blow, from all the superficial obstacles that stand in the way, and have the necessary obscurity of name and position, and have at the same time widowhood or matronhood, or whatever is required to make me the sort of chaperon you want! You may think I am joking; but, upon my honor, I’d do anything possible to be able to give real practical help to you now. I seem,” she said with a sudden fierceness, “to be under a sort of curse,—a curse of impotence! I can never *do* anything. My utmost always

seems to be to forbear. I have held myself back for some opportunity to do something with my life, but the opportunity never comes, and it never will. O Lucien, you will do me the greatest benefit any human being has ever done me if you will show me how to help you now."

He did not speak at once. Turning full toward her, he caught one of his knees between his clasped hands, throwing his body backward as he sat on the music-stool; and, with his arms strained to this tense position and his keen eye narrowed to a deep intensity of gaze, he looked at her. She met his look with earnest candor.

"Millicent," he said, "never have I been more unhappy than I am now. Never has life seemed more dark on every side. But you and your friendship pierce the gloom with the light of a fixed star. The knowledge of you now is all I have to save me from despair."

Millicent's eyes filled.

"O Lucien," she said, "trust God. Have hope."

"I can trust him better because he has testified to me of his existence by you. I can hope, too, since I know that such a soul as yours lives in a human body. Without this knowledge men and women would seem to me now completely base,

and their unworthiness of a life to come would make the thought of that life seem an absurdity. How can you say, then, that you have not helped me? You don't believe that now?"

"No," she said, very pale, and speaking with a sort of breathlessness. "I believe what you say, and it frightens me. O Lucien, perhaps, if you knew my whole life better, you would change your mind about me. I am as little as possible like a fixed and always clearly shining star. There have been times when evil has almost conquered good in me,—when I have been so lost in the clouds of selfishness and wilfulness that no human being could have got a ray of light from me. Don't, I implore you, think me better than I am. There have been times in my life which I cannot bear the thought of your eyes upon."

"I know it. It is clearly revealed to me. The body of Moses is in your beautiful face, and I see the traces of the struggle between God and the devil. But don't you see, can't you understand, how that endears you to me? I have learned this much from life,—to count mere personal rectitude very little. It may save one's own soul as it saves one's body; but what of the souls and bodies of others? The people who have never done any harm have probably done as little good,

To keep one's own skirts clear is surely a small result for the glorious opportunities that life affords. Give me rather generous faults,—wrongs committed and repented of! For sin itself has its noble use in God's great plan for man. It strengthens his moral muscles, and it gives him insight and power to help others. Compared to this, what is blamelessness? It is the attribute of the infant, the humming-bird, the flower! Whether it is the attribute of the angels or not we don't know; but, if we ever come to be inhabitants of heaven, one thing we shall surely see,—that victory is better than innocence; and, without sin, victory could not be. All this would appear to some too daring; but I have a high precedent for it, at least. David was the man after God's own heart, and Mary Magdalen was the friend of Christ."

"Oh, what strong, what helpful, what inspiring words!" said Millicent, her eyes filling with tears. "Surely, they are our greatest benefactors who give us thoughts by which our souls grow and our hearts get courage. This is the very best that human beings can do for each other, Lucien,—better than love itself!"

He looked at her, a long, penetrating gaze; and then he said abruptly:

"You have said that to give me the courage which you see my need of in this hour. But are you right, Millicent? Is anything so good as love?"

"Nothing so sweet," she said, "nothing so satisfying to the human need. But the divine is in us, as well as the human; and to obey that is better than anything. Often what it teaches is the renunciation of love. Of one thing I am certain: if we are not able to do without it, we are not worthy to have it."

Still his eyes held hers with that searching, concentrated look, as he answered:

"Your lips are uttering what the divine voice within is whispering to my soul. My life has been a long struggle, Millicent; but to-night I give it up. All my life I have been a seeker after love. It seemed, for me, the one indispensable good. From to-night I give up the search. You have put into words the consciousness in my soul that there is something better. To find that must be, for the future, my object and my end."

"Thank God!" she said, her firm voice slightly shaken. "O Lucien, if you ever pray,—and I know you do pray in your soul, whether with your lips and on your knees or not,—ask God to give me courage for my life, too. I know that he

will not fail me ; but, oh, I *do* need help ! I have had the same end before me as yours,— love, love, love, beyond everything ; and I don't believe I, either, ever quite gave it up until to-night. But I am not strong, as you are. I am only a woman, with no career, no work, no influence ; and often it will go hard with me.”

“No influence ? Let me tell you something. If I had ever influenced a human life as you have influenced mine, if I had ever put such faith in God and man into any human heart as you have put into mine, I should think it work, career, achievement enough, if there was nothing else that I had done.”

Millicent smiled. A look of radiant joy banished the clouds of disturbance and doubt her face had shown ; and with the impulsiveness of a child she exclaimed :

“Oh, I'm very happy. God is good. Life is good. Renunciation is sweet, as well as bitter.”

He smiled in answer.

“We should both be happy in this hour,” he said ; “for we have both been able to prefer a higher will to our own, or rather to merge our wills into the higher. This hour has given you to me, Millicent, in a sense most real and precious,— a sense in which you will be forever mine, and I

yours. Never have I felt so sure, so steadfast, so firm upon my feet as I feel now; and to you I shall owe this forever. Yes, as you say, life is good, if we make it so; and there is more life and fuller beyond."

For a moment neither spoke. They only looked into each other's eyes.

Presently Struan said, "Would it disturb any one if I played to you?"

"Not in the least. *Do* play. It would comfort us both, I think."

They were as much alone as if they had been in a desert. Millicent sank back in her deep chair, and turned her face against its padded side, so that she might look at him. His profile only was in her view. He had a way of looking upward when he was playing, and she could see the curve of his strong throat coming out of its low collar. He had none of the nervous movements common to most pianists, but kept his head so still, except when he occasionally looked down at his hands, that she could trace every change of expression in eyes and brows and lips.

Sometimes his gaze was turned only upon the picture which hung over the piano; but once, once only, he turned it upon her. He did not stop playing as he did so, but struck unerringly

the sounding chords of some great harmony while he turned his face toward her, and held her eyes with that poignant gaze.

Their faces were very near, and he could see that Millicent's eyes had tears in them. As his arms moved from place to place over the keyboard, while he played, now loud, now low, his body was still, and the direction of his eyes unchanging.

The two tears overflowed and rolled down Millicent's cheeks, but she was motionless in every muscle. He bent a little nearer to her; and something in his glance compelled her to lean forward also, so that their faces were very near, and their eyes could read each other deep. The music was so soft that she could hear her own thick heart-beats; but all through this long moment that low harmony went on, without the slurring of a note.

At last, in a great chord of deep resounding sweetness, it ceased; and Struan rose to his feet.

Millicent got up, too; and they stood facing each other.

She felt her two hands taken in a strong clasp, and heard him say in a voice that was as strong:

"There, Millicent. I feel now that there is not a film between my soul and yours. I am not afraid of life, with your faith to keep me

strong. Let my faith help you, too. Some time, in years to come, we will speak together of this hour, and of the fruits of it in both our lives."

As he stood an instant longer so, holding her hands and looking into her eyes, she smiled. He smiled in answer,—a smile as inscrutable as hers. Yet they understood each other; for their hands clasped yet more warmly for a second, and then they parted.

Struan was long in going to sleep that night; but he was calm, composed, and resolute as to the future. But Millicent was a woman, and her heart was torn with woman pangs. So, while he lay there planning his course of action in a life which would divide him from her forever, she lay in a room near by, and shook from head to foot with sobs. Her spirit had not weakened, her purpose had not faltered; but she was bewildered, hungry, and alone, and she cried there in the darkness, like a little helpless child.

XXV

NEXT morning, when Miss Evleth's coffee was brought in to her, there was a black-lettered, yellow envelope among the mail matter on her tray. She reached to get it; but, before her hand touched it, she had recognized the writing on another envelope which had neither stamp nor post-mark.

Making some pretext to send her maid away, she put her coffee by untasted, and opened Struan's note. It enclosed a telegram, and ran :

I am taking first train for San Francisco. Say nothing to Leonard. I will write to him and to you later. The enclosed will explain all.

The telegram within the letter simply stated that Jenny had been injured in the burning of the Star Theatre in San Francisco. It was signed Ida Wallis.

For some moments Millicent remained motionless, this telegram in her hand. She had read it several times before she remembered the other telegram. This proved to be from her aunt, and was in these words :

Come as soon as possible. All arrangements made.

Within a week of that morning Millicent sailed for Europe. Leonard came to say good-by and see her off. They had had tidings from Struan that Jenny's injury was a most serious one. She might live, but, if so, would be a cripple for life.

As Millicent and Leonard were parting on the deck of the steamer, the hearts of both were profoundly sad. She tried to say some brave words to him, but voice and spirit seemed to falter; and she could only promise to write soon and often, and to love him always.

When the notice came for visitors to leave the ship, she raised her face and kissed him, the tears overflowing her eyes. He wrung her hand and went, without a word.

She watched him on the wharf, pushing his way through the surging crowd, his great height making him easily distinguishable. Once he turned, and they smiled, each for the sake of the other, and waved a cheerful adieu; but they knew it was rather a poor effort. She watched him still, escaped from the crowd, walking with his great stride, and pounding the ground with his stick, unconscious of everything around him, but conscious, as she knew, of a deep loneliness within.

After the ship had sailed, a telegram was handed her, which had been brought on board at the last moment. It was from Struan, and its message was that Jenny was dead.

This brief announcement, and the unexpected feeling which she knew had gone into it, touched Millicent to tenderness and tears. What a great loneliness his life had been all through! How lonely all lives seemed! For such natures as theirs — Struan's and Leonard's and her own — there was no cure for this loneliness except in the complement of self by union with its human mate. Struan had missed that consummation. She had missed it. Would Leonard attain to it, and would their two lonely hearts have their only vision of joy through him?

Her passionate regret for the man was mingled with a passionate hope for the boy, as she stood looking back from the deck of the steamer which was bearing her away from them both into the yet deeper loneliness of a life in which they had no part.

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